

WHICH FREEDOM

AN ESSAY ABOUT FREEDOM AND CIVILISATION

Weia Reinboud

Translated by Stuart Field

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1 FREEDOM: A MANY-HEADED CONCEPT

Freedom is a many-headed concept, one could say a many-headed monster. Although freedom is considered a good thing, and the phrase ‘good monster’ sounds a bit odd. Enough books have been written about freedom to fill entire libraries. Amongst other things, these books talk about ‘freedom from’ and ‘freedom to’, or ‘negative freedom’ and ‘positive freedom’, where ‘freedom from’ is negative and ‘freedom to’ is positive. Or is it the other way round? I always forget, because some concepts, while described as positive, are in fact anything but, such as to be HIV-positive, which is really negative. Or a positive drug test in sport, which is also worth avoiding.

I don’t intend to use the existing terminology. As I have described elsewhere,¹ my preference is to investigate the axioms, the basic assumptions and the hidden elements behind each theory. I will therefore use my own definition of freedom, a definition which fits the purposes of this book.

I will not be going through libraries full of material on freedom. Indeed, I have only (re-)read a small part of the existing material, and in writing about what I have read I will make use of the opinions of others who have their own interpretations of freedom, in which they may or may not show awareness of freedom’s many-headed or monstrous nature.

‘Eh bien...’ (‘Oh well’)… with these stopgap words, Tolstoy began his notoriously long novel ‘War and Peace’—1,500 pages, starting with stopgap words! There is no way that I will reach 1,500 pages, but there is enough to say about the different types of freedom, the relationship between individuals and society, scarcity and money, hunger, misery and capital, causes, effects and consequences, laziness and other desires, punishment and regulations, invisible hands, rich and poor and frugal and civilised. There will be plenty of occasions for cynical comments but also for positive stories. *Eh bien...*

2 I-FREEDOM: DOING WHAT YOU WANT

I will begin with the easiest definition of all: freedom is doing what you want.

I call this i-freedom, using the i of individual, because it is based on purely individual reasoning. An individual might want to eat a lot or not eat at all, to go cycling or read long books, to dig the garden or study, to build houses or photograph them, or many other things imaginable.

The second aspect of this definition is that it is entirely free of value judgements. Eating a lot or eating nothing can be judged negatively, but if that’s what someone wants to do and they do it, they are exercising freedom. The same is true for someone who turns up the volume and allows their music to blare out of an open window, someone who races 314 kilometres per hour along back roads in a car, someone who collects cars or other CO₂-machines, or someone involved in pick pocketing. The same is also true for someone who beats up the neighbour whose music blares out of an open window.

If all of that is included in freedom, then freedom is a monstrous thing and not particularly something to make a stand for. All the same, I will leave this definition as it stands. It is quite possible to come up with a definition in which freedom is conceived as something splendid. When freedom is put forward as a high-minded ideal, it implies the inclusion of a concept such as ‘taking others into account’, but for i-freedom I specifically want a definition that in a real way covers all individuals and all their possible actions. In that case, beating up beastly neighbours has to fall within the definition.

Of course in addition, wanting to mediate in conflicts between neighbours is also included. Someone who does this exercises freedom. The same is true of those who take elderly people in wheelchairs to the park on a sunny day, or baby-sit free of charge, or clear

up litter. Everything is included, from helping to killing. If you are doing what you want, then this is i-freedom.

3 HUMAN NATURE

It goes without saying that breathing is natural. It's also natural to fall asleep and to wake up again a few hours later. Going for a wee or a crap is also natural. But the arguments as to what is natural begin with the ingredients that end up as pee and poo. Are humans naturally omnivores, herbivores or carnivores?

Take the example of exercise. Most children naturally learn to walk of their own accord—so walking is natural. Yet when stairs and escalators go up side by side in a station, ninety five percent of the people take the escalator. It appears as if humans are natural escalator riders.

I am beginning with these issues because life with a load of individuals all exercising their own personal freedom is not always pleasant. Some very unpleasant things are included in the list of actions falling within i-freedom, as already described. Sure, some say, humans are selfish by nature; the Hobbesian war of all against all is the natural state of affairs. No, say others, the fact that you find this situation unpleasant demonstrates that humans are by nature social creatures, and social creatures look after each other in one way or another; that is really the natural state of affairs.

The word ‘natural’ is clearly subject to a variety of interpretations. A so-called ‘appeal to nature’ can be used as the basis of a fallacious argument, by using the ‘naturalness’ of behaviour to determine that it is acceptable, or appropriate, or saying ‘that’s just the way it is’. You can use the example of wars between ant colonies to substantiate the idea that waging war is a natural attribute of various species. Alternatively, you can point to the example of co-operation between ants to substantiate the idea that co-operation is totally natural. You can use species closely related to humans, such as chimpanzees, to indicate that social behaviour is natural. Or you can use chimpanzees to indicate that machismo is natural. Whatever behaviour you

choose, if you look around in the natural world, you may well find an example of it, suggesting that it is natural... So what?

I will not be using the concept of ‘naturalness’, because it can only be used appropriately in the most banal everyday situations. Eating and sleeping are natural, but for more complex issues, ‘natural’ or ‘unnatural’ shouldn’t be used. I think this applies to all cases where people’s brains have to make decisions, where behaviour doesn’t happen automatically but has to be thought about, where behaviour is planned, or in all cases where behaviour is based on something agreed in advance. Eating, for example, is natural, but eating Brussels sprouts cannot be considered natural behaviour, because you must choose whether to eat them or not.

There is another thing worth considering. There are plenty of reasons to say human nature is bad: things like murders, wars, fights, rapes, lies, gossip, tax evasion and speeding take place all the time. Concerted action also leads to water pollution, seas being fished until empty, the climate damaged, etcetera. There are also plenty of reasons to say human nature is good: people looking after others, collecting money for good causes, glass collected for recycling, voluntary work, and many other things. It is surprising that you often hear that humans are either good or bad by nature, because it is as clear as day that both options are open to humans. The solution is therefore very simple: nature includes the possibilities to do good things or to be a pest to others.

In other words, there are two natural possibilities: to take care of yourself, or to take care of a group or society as a whole.

The problem is that there exists an area of tension between the two. Taking care of yourself is what I have called i-freedom: a concept of freedom which encompasses all the good or ugly things that anyone can imagine.

4 THE I-SOCIETY

The last chapter was about the individual, but what should you call the whole? ‘Society’, ‘culture’ and ‘civilisation’ are all terms

with vague boundaries, which can be used interchangeably or not. ‘Nation’ and ‘race’ have also been tried, but these concepts have led to a large number of deaths, so I will certainly not use them. But which word should I use?

‘Culture’, in the general sense of the word, refers to the collection of customs or habits of a particular region or period. Examples include Western culture, the culture of the Aka pygmies or the headhunters’ culture. More specifically, there is the culture of draughts-players, hockey-players or the Sicilian mafia. In the last of these cases, ‘civilisation’ doesn’t immediately spring to mind. Although ‘culture’ and ‘civilisation’ are often used interchangeably, there are clearly boundaries. For the word ‘civilisation’ to be applicable, there must be an element that can in some sense be described as civilised. When many individuals in a particular region exercise particular forms of i-freedom, then these freedoms evidently form part of the culture. Culture, insofar as it is described in this book, is an i-concept. It doesn’t necessarily indicate pleasant things, excellent behaviour or something of that nature, but whether something is usual, statistically occurs frequently, or is behaviour exhibited by many individuals.

While English generally uses ‘society’ for the sum of all the individuals in a particular region, Dutch has two different words. The first one, ‘samenleving’ (literally ‘together-living’) seems more neutral to me because, although ‘together’ generally sounds positive, in actual fact it is strictly neutral. This is illustrated by sentences such as ‘the knight and his victim sat together on his horse’ or ‘the masked hijackers and their captives can be seen together on the photo’. In these cases, there is no sense of intentional togetherness.

The other Dutch word for society, ‘maatschappij’, literally means ‘partnership-ness’. ‘Partner’ and ‘partnership’ have a stronger positive sound than ‘together’, but I need a term that simply indicates the sum of the individuals, an i-concept. I will use ‘society’, or ‘i-society’, to mean the sum of the individuals in a particular region.

5 THE PARK BENCH

Imagine that it is the first fine day of spring. In the big city, everyone goes outside. All over the park people are taking a walk, and all the benches provided by the council are full. Someone arrives—let us call this person ‘he’. He could sit on the ground to eat his bag of chips, but that is not what he does. He goes across to a bench which four people are sitting on, so that it is full. No one else can fit on it. But he is quite fat, and using his large body he gives a heavy shove to the person on his end of the bench. This shove causes everyone on the bench to shift half a metre sideways, and he sits down in the space this has created. Then he begins to eat. Munching, gobbling, gorging, guzzling, stuffing himself, the details aren’t that important. While doing this, he fails to notice that the person on the other end of the bench has toppled off.

This was i-freedom in full action.

What we see here is a small free society of five individuals who are doing what they want. This mini-society has at its disposal one park bench for four people, and Number Five has to sort it out for himself.

Is ‘sort it out for yourself’ what happens every time when i-freedom is the norm in a society? In this case, the problem is that some people do what they want but at the same time prevent others from doing what they want. It can even be the case that someone who does what he wants causes something really undesirable to happen to someone else, in this case, ending up on the ground next to a bench in a park. What’s more, as in many parks where i-freedom is the custom, there is likely to be dog poo on the ground.

All the same, i-freedom itself is not the cause of all the trouble, because events could have taken a quite different course whilst still under i-freedom.

‘Hello. Beautiful day, isn’t it?’

‘Definitely. I’ve been sitting here an hour already. Would you like to sit here and eat your chips?’

'Don't worry, I don't mind standing.'

'Anyway, I'm going for a walk, so feel free to take my place.'

'Thank you.'

6 PROHIBITION?

This gives rise to an interesting paradox. If it is the custom in a society to enjoy i-freedom to the full, then you run the risk of being pushed off a bench, or that someone will start an argument, go berserk, get a gun, and start shooting madly at those in the vicinity. The risk of this happening is something that people really want to avoid. The paradox is therefore that when i-freedom, i.e. doing what you want, is the norm in a society, this can lead to a society that a lot of people don't want to live in. You may want i-freedom itself, but the sum of all i-freedoms paradoxically turns into something which you don't want. In other words, at a societal level, i-freedom is a totally unattractive concept.

At this point there are two possible strategies. The first one is to draw up lists of i-freedoms which need to be restrained or prohibited. The other is to put aside the concept of i-freedom and employ another concept of freedom, one in which the effects on society are included in one way or another. Since i-freedom is named after the 'i' of individual, this could be called s-freedom, where 's' stands for society. The first strategy, based on restraining i-freedoms, is a familiar one. Lists of prohibited freedoms are called laws, and they include details of which punishments are applied when a specific law is broken. In a society with laws such as these, people generally obey, and it can appear that people stick to the prohibitions because otherwise they would be punished. It might seem that people avoid committing murder because of fear of prison. However, I wonder to what extent this is really so. Couldn't it be the case that large numbers of people do not commit murder simply because they consider it a horrible thing to do? Most people really don't want to murder anyone. Or in terms of freedom, they have absolutely no desire to have the freedom to carry out murder.

This somewhat resembles the assertion that many people are good by nature. I have often heard it said that five percent of people are really bad, five percent are really good, and the remaining ninety percent go with the flow to some extent. If Nazism is in vogue, they go along with it, but if Dutch-style pacifist neutralism is in vogue, then that becomes their favourite ideology.

I don't want to get my hands burned by discussing the very slippery concepts of good and evil, as they are not central to my argument. But the 5-90-5 percent idea sounds quite attractive, at least in the world as it stands. There is a small group of people who you can totally rely on, another small group who never let anything get in their way and a large majority where you hope that they will join up with the first group rather than the second group.

For the group of people who of their own accord do not commit crimes, criminal law does not need to exist at all. But it could well be the case that the size of this group is dependent on, and inversely proportional to, the seriousness of the offence. Hardly anyone considers committing a serious offence a worthwhile option, but as for a less serious offence such as tax evasion...

7 SOCIETAL FREEDOM

In the story of the park bench and the man eating chips, two different problems come to light. The i-freedom of the chip-eater results in someone else experiencing something that is totally unwanted, i.e. falling off a bench, ending up covered in dog poo and hurting his backside. In this case, one person's i-freedom leads therefore to misery for another person, and it is obvious that this type of i-freedom cannot be included in s-freedom. In other words, s-freedom is the collection of those i-freedoms which do not cause harm to others. A different way of saying this is that an i-freedom is included in the set of s-freedoms if, and only if, that i-freedom does not lead to harm to another person.

The freedom to beat an annoying neighbour to death is not included in s-freedom, because the neighbour would experience misery as a

result. Actually, of course, he experiences nothing more at all, but he was not laughing just before being murdered. The freedom of the chip-eater to shove another person off the bench is not included in s-freedom because at least one of those sitting on the bench experiences misery by being pushed off—but actually I think that all those sitting on the bench found it unpleasant, particularly the one who found himself sitting next to someone noisily eating chips.

This leads to the second problem arising in the story of the park bench: scarcity. There is simply one place too few on the bench. How can this be addressed?

It can be addressed in a very friendly manner as described, by dividing up the scarcity. There are several ways of doing this, e.g. seeing who has sat on the bench for longest, who finds it hardest to walk, who most wants to hear the songbird singing in the bushes close by. Alternatively, you could devise an ingenious mathematical solution to divide up the time sitting on the bench, based on the rain and sunshine index, or a ticketing system could be introduced, etcetera. There is a whole spectrum from friendly solutions ('Feel free to take my place, I've sat here for some time already.') to precise rules for dividing up scarcity (e.g. crossing off two boxes on a ticket entitles the holder to one hour on the bench). How can this be incorporated into s-freedom? How can scarcity be dealt with by s-freedom?

I think *something* needs to be done because those sitting on the bench can, by their joint action of remaining seated, lead to the freedom that they are exercising being made inaccessible to someone else. This is despite the fact that sitting on a bench appears to be a very innocent pastime, and therefore a very innocent i-freedom which you might normally expect to be included in s-freedom.

To summarise: first of all, a freedom which causes misery is not an s-freedom. Secondly, there is the question of how to deal with types of freedom that, when exercised by one person, become inaccessible for others. Does this count as causing misery? In any case, these types of freedom cannot be added together to result in freedom on the level of society. There is simply no space to accommodate the sum of such freedoms.

8 FREEDOM AS A FOUNDATION

Imagine that you have the opportunity to organise a society. As it happens, you like doing what you want, you are fond of i-freedom, you are individualistically minded, and because of all of these things you want freedom to be the foundation of the society.

Of course, you could have chosen other foundations. History gives us plenty of examples. Amongst the ancient Greeks, philosophy was very popular, but one of the foundations for organising their society was slavery. No freedom for some people, in other words. A remarkably small number of their philosophers who we still know of argued unsuccessfully against this.

Sexism has also very often been chosen as one of the foundations of a society.

Another foundation that has often been tried is that the individual is unimportant and should make herself or himself subordinate to the whole, or to an idea, a robber baron, a political party, or to the whims of a dictator or a church.

You are aware of these historical precedents, but you want freedom to be the foundation of your society. You only need to reflect a little in order to see that the type of freedom that is suitable as a foundation of a society cannot be i-freedom, because although it includes some pleasant activities, it also includes activities that are very unpleasant for others. Instead it has to be s-freedom, because you do not want to build misery into the foundations of your society; there is logically no other choice than to choose s-freedom as the foundation.

'Yes, but...' is what you will probably hear from people who have particular i-freedoms as their hobby, i-freedoms that suddenly are not included in s-freedom. 'Don't take away my freedom', they will say.

As we saw in the last chapter, problems may be lurking even within innocent freedoms such as sitting on a park bench. It is of course great when people stand up of their own accord when someone is

looking for a place to sit in a park, but how can you incorporate that sort of behaviour into the foundation of a society? By using a law to govern scarcity? Perhaps something like ‘when there is a lack of places to sit on benches, sitting on a bench is only an s-freedom when you stand up of your own accord from time to time in order to make space for someone else’.

A regulation such as this has a remarkable effect, albeit indirectly via scarcity, because the regulation makes polite behaviour compulsory, as it were. It would be good if there was another possibility so that all other aspects of society are as free as they possibly can be.

9 SCARCITY AND CIVILISED NEGOTIATION

The concepts of culture and civilisation have already been mentioned. These can often be used interchangeably, but when brutish customs form part of a particular culture, it is not so likely to be termed ‘civilised’. If in a particular culture the normal response to a murder is to murder someone else from the murderer’s family, then such a murder may be culturally appropriate but it does not indicate civilised behaviour. In any case, in this book I will not consider a vendetta where there is one murder after another as a sign of civilisation.

The same is true of what the chip-eating man did. Grabbing a seat on a bench by pushing someone else off does not lie within my definition of ‘civilisation’. I imagine that a large number of people would agree with me on this.

It might be that the chip-eater manages to stop himself shoving anyone off the bench, but all he can think about is whether there will be a free place on the bench and what he could do to obtain a place on the bench. You could call this greediness to get a place a lack of internal civilisation, but in terms of freedom the chip-eater is obsessed with i-freedom, and doesn’t care that scarcity exists.

Occupying places as quickly as possible once they become free is an i-freedom that can be added up to give freedom on the level of society. It is technically possible that in a society, everyone continu-

ally stands in the starting position to occupy spaces as soon as they become free. But is that something worth having? Turmoil, impatience and greed would surely become the norm.

The definition of i-freedom was ‘doing what you want’, and the idea of ‘not wanting murders all over the place’ led to the definition of s-freedom. The effects of scarcity could not easily be included in this, but one possible solution comes via the concept ‘civilised’ used in a narrow sense. The idea of ‘not wanting continual turmoil as a reaction to scarcity’ leads, firstly, to the conclusion that we need to aim for s-freedom rather than i-freedom. Secondly, it leads to the conclusion that we should negotiate with each other when resources are scarce.

The more general concept of civilisation refers to societies: the Chinese civilisation, the Greek civilisation, Western civilisation, Islamic civilisation, Roman civilisation, the civilisations of the Aztecs, Minoans, Torajas, Mbuti, etcetera. For the definition of ‘civilised’ used in this book means using the societal effects of your actions as the guideline for choosing what you want and don’t want to do. The greater the importance of the societal level in making this choice, the higher the level of civilisation in that individual.

This does not need to be laid down in formal rules. Think, for example, of what happens in a shopping district on a busy day. There are no traffic rules for pedestrians, sometimes they keep left and sometimes they keep right, but it still works remarkably well. Very occasionally there is a blockage or even a disturbance, sometimes a slow and noisy chip-eater is dawdling in the spot where you wanted to walk briskly, but hey, why do you want to occupy the exact spot where someone else is?

We’ll sort out this sort of thing ourselves.

‘Have a good day.’

And they lived happily ever after.

IO WHERE DOES INTEREST COME FROM?

Imagine a small planet. Not as small as the planet in Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's 'The Little Prince', but a planet on which exactly one thousand adults live, plus two rich people. Imagine that on that planet everything is very well organised: the thousand adults all have work, they all earn the same amount, they all have enough to eat, they have enough free time, and notably they all work very efficiently. Life on the small planet appears very similar to what we are familiar with. There are farmers and shops, newspapers and concerts, there is an athletics track, a park, a printer and a museum, and there is a bank.

Imagine, then, that the New Year begins. Old diaries are thrown away, new calendars are hung on walls, and the two rich people receive ten percent interest on their bank balances.

Where does that money come from?

One rich person's money does not come from the other rich person, as both of them receive the same amount of interest. The money isn't dug up from the ground by gardeners, it doesn't hang on trees. There is only one possibility: it must come from the other thousand people.

These thousand people couldn't work any harder, because their working week is fully utilised, so what the bank probably did is to deduct a small amount of money from each of the thousand people and credit the accounts of the two rich people. Or perhaps the bank was clever and didn't take the money from the accounts of the thousand working people, but printed extra money instead. If so, then because the new money is indistinguishable from the old money, this reduces the value of all the money and causes inflation. There is more money but the quantity of economic transactions remains the same, so the amount of money needed per transaction becomes higher. If this route is chosen, the thousand working people still end up paying the cost because they receive the same amount of

money as before but the money doesn't go as far because everything costs more.

The two rich people can leave the interest in their bank accounts, or hide it under their mattresses. They could also buy things with the extra money. But on the small planet, that means that they buy something that would earlier have been bought by one or more of the thousand working people. The purchasing power of the rich people increases at the cost of the purchasing power of the thousand working people. This does not make them poor immediately, but they do become a little poorer.

Comparing the course of events on the planet of a thousand people with the park bench incident, what are the similarities and differences, both for the positive and negative points?

And the big question: how civilised (in the narrow sense of the word that I am using in this book) is the situation on the small planet?

II BECOMING RICHER AT THE EXPENSE OF...

On a planet with a thousand working people plus two rich people, you can imagine that everyone knows everybody else. You can imagine that there are two bakers, one librarian, one person to deliver the post—but you would not expect there to be a newspaper with a stock market page written especially for the two rich people.

Let's instead imagine a larger planet where a thousand times as many people live. Or better still, a thousand times as many as this. This would make a billion working people, plus two million rich people. Now it is easier to imagine that there are banks and stock market pages, many bakers and postal workers, ships to transport goods across the oceans, etcetera. Everyone only knows a small proportion of the other inhabitants, i.e. there are few acquaintances and many strangers.

Imagine, again, that the New Year begins. The billion working people have no savings, their money is used up at the end of each month, so they don't receive any interest. But the rich people do. A year later, the same thing happens.

A year later...

After thirty years, the rich people's capital has been multiplied by a factor of seventeen because of compound interest. The capital obtained from interest didn't grow on trees, swim in the sea or fall from the sky, it came out of the pockets of the billion working people. And the rich people only had to keep an eye on the stock market pages to make that happen—in fact, they probably even got someone else to do that for them.

It is a bit unrealistic, in the sense of not being similar to the real planet called Earth, to expect that a billion people would all earn exactly the same amount, all work the same amount, all earn no interest, etcetera. It is just not realistic that everything would work in such perfect order on a planet of this size. More realistically, there are likely to be super-rich people, 'ordinary' rich people, well-off people, middle-class people, average people, hard-up people and poor people. Imagine that there are about one thousand different levels of income.

Imagine once again that the New Year arrives.

The same old story.

Only the richest people receive ten percent interest; 'ordinary' rich people receive seven percent, middle-class people four percent, and hard-up people only receive one percent interest.

And the poor people?

They get the short end of the stick.

I2 CAPITALISM: MONEY MAKES MONEY

The situation described above begins to resemble what happens on the real planet Earth with real existing capitalism. Capitalism is a word with many different definitions, but mine is that capitalism is a system that is not concerned about what money is used for as long as money creates more money so that capital grows. The violin maker may sell a beautiful violin, but you cannot see from the money which changed hands in the transaction that it once represented the cost of that violin. In the same way, money carries

no indication as to whether it originated from growing potatoes, selling books, putting on a jazz concert, human trafficking or selling cocaine. Trade is trade, and money is money, and money must make a profit.

Or so they say.

Let's look for a moment at a side issue that is not insignificant. 'Money economy', 'free market economy' and 'capitalist economy' are not three expressions for the same thing. They are three separate possible features for establishing an economy. When you have three features such as these, each of which could be present or absent, you normally have eight different scenarios in which different combinations of these are present. Not all eight are possible in practice, for example, a capitalist economy is always a money economy, but various combinations are imaginable. The three features are often mentioned in the same breath, but there is no logical necessity that they should all go together. Talking about money, the free market and capitalism as if they automatically belong together is not a statement of fact but an ideological position.

Taking an ideological position is a freedom which one has, of course.

In the same way, there is also the freedom to research other possibilities. A market economy in which money is not used, but exchangeable pieces of paper that are only valid within a radius of ten kilometres. Or an economy where basic needs are not met by the market but via distribution or rationing, and a money economy only exists for luxury items. Or a money-based market economy where interest is prohibited, as was the case in Christian countries in the Middle Ages, and still is for Islam—prohibitions which, for that matter, were, and still are, sidestepped in a variety of ways.

I3 VICTIMS OF I-FREEDOM

NRC-Handelsblad, a Dutch newspaper, reported on 16th October 2006 that at that time 28,000 people in the world died of hunger each day. The credit crisis of 2008/2009 will not have improved this

figure. When someone dies of hunger, you know for certain that not enough means of subsistence have flowed in their direction. Equally, you know for certain that at the same time money has flowed into the bank accounts of rich people. The same flow could well be involved in each case.

Indeed, there is a net flow of money from poor countries to rich ones, within poor countries from the poorest of all to the rich, and within rich countries from minimum wage earners to top earners. Given that these flows of money result in 28,000 people dying of hunger per day, this equates to a hundred million people in a decade. This makes capitalism win hands down over Nazism and Communism, the pernicious forms of government which were popular for some time in some countries in the twentieth century and caused immense numbers of deaths. But they were not pernicious enough to beat capitalism in terms of the numbers of people dying.

Let us think about how the state of affairs under capitalism compares to the happenings around the park bench. Shoving someone off a park bench seems relatively innocent compared to shoving 28,000 souls per day out of the world of the living. In terms of freedom, when the freedom of owners of capital to keep money flowing towards them leads elsewhere to people dying of hunger, then the freedom that the owners of capital are exercising is not s-freedom.

What this amounts to, quite simply, is that the free market in the capitalist sense of the term cannot be described as civilised.

The widely-praised free market is not so free that trafficking in women and cocaine is tolerated, even though they are ways of accumulating a lot of capital. But investing in the manufacture of cluster bombs is tolerated, as is the wringing of hands when these bombs are actually thrown into a crowd of people, so that the production of bombs continues or even grows.

Growth is wonderful.

And this growth is violent.

But you won't see that from the figures on the stock market pages in the newspapers. Industry is doing well, capital is producing a return.

On the planet of a thousand people, things were organised so that

no one died of hunger. It was also clear that the money earned by the two rich people by means of interest came out of the pockets of the thousand other people. There were no phenomena that made this flow of money obscure, such as sackings, bankruptcies, differences in income, protectionism, inflation, differences in productivity, extension of working hours, stock market crises, child labour, low-wage countries, subsidies, etcetera. So, for the planet of a thousand people, you can use the simple arithmetic that you learned at primary school to work out that it will go wrong after a number of years. At one point, so much money will have been taken out of the pockets of the thousand people that they will all keel over from hunger.

On the planet of real existing capitalism, of course, exactly the same thing happens. The fact that the free market is free is not a problem. The fact that it is a capitalist free market is a problem, because the market evidently allows all sorts of i-freedoms to be exercised that are not s-freedoms. Hunger for money in one place leads to deaths from hunger elsewhere. Just as before, only the simplest arithmetical knowledge is needed to work this out.

14 FOR ALL OR ONLY FOR SOME?

In the Netherlands there are two political parties with 'freedom' in their names. There are also left-wing libertarians, liberals and right-wing libertarians, terms related to 'liberty'.^{*} 'Liberaal', the Dutch word for 'liberal', generally refers to right-of-centre politics, whereas in English, 'liberal' tends to refer to left-of-centre politics. Liberal politicians are in favour of the parliamentary system, as are some people who call themselves libertarians, but other libertarians (both left and right-wing) take an anti-parliamentary approach. (Dutch has two separate words for left-wing and right-wing libertarians, whereas English just has one word, as far as I know.)

* Note from the translator: Dutch only has one word, 'vrijheid', meaning both 'freedom' and 'liberty'. In this book I have generally translated it as 'freedom' except where the context makes 'liberty' a better choice.

All of these different political factions disagree strongly with one another. The question then arises, which freedom are they talking about?

'One person's freedom ends where another's begins'. This is a good saying, which seems to refer to what I have called s-freedom, societal freedom or social freedom. This saying can be found both in the manifesto of the Dutch conservative-liberal vvd and in the writings of the Dutch anarchist Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis (1846-1919), and you would not have expected them to agree with one another if they had both been around at the same time.

'I am truly free only when all human beings, men and women, are equally free'. This is a saying which you might expect to hear from an advocate of free speech, but in fact comes from the revolutionary anarchist Mikhail Alexandrovich Bakunin (1814-1876).

Put a group of people together, give them a word to interpret, and they'll fly off in all directions!

As I said in the previous chapter, as far as I am concerned, capitalism does not belong with s-freedom. All politicians who talk about freedom while supporting capitalism are therefore primarily talking about i-freedom, not s-freedom. They are talking about forms of freedom which do not add up to s-freedom, individual freedoms which are incompatible when added up. Therefore, what they really mean is freedom for some people. And the rest are left to figure it out for themselves.

I fear that this applies to virtually all politicians. Even in parties where some members have a bit of a libertarian streak, the party line becomes firmly capitalist as soon as a seat in government appears on the horizon.

15 WEALTH IS TIED TO POVERTY

Earlier, I wrote that if you wish for freedom to be the foundation for organising a society, then this must necessarily be s-freedom. In other words, it must include only those i-freedoms which do not generate misery on the level of society. The freedom to kill a bad

neighbour is not s-freedom, neither is the freedom to shove someone off a park bench. And the freedom for money to flow in such a way that someone dies of hunger is also not s-freedom.

This means that Dutch politicians who talk about freedom and are pro-capitalism do not really want freedom (s-freedom) as the foundation of society. I repeat, they do not want freedom to be chosen as the foundation of society. This is true even if 'freedom' appears in the name of their party.

In other countries, I fear, the same is likely to be true.

The politicians want freedom for some people even if it causes lack of freedom for others. But they don't say so out loud.

This is crazy. On the planet of a thousand people, you could see that a thousand people were disadvantaged and just two gained an advantage from how things were organised. In a real existing capitalist society, something similar is taking place but with different numbers. What is crazy is that a substantial majority are disadvantaged by the capitalist way of organising society, yet this majority mostly vote for pro-capitalist politicians. That, of course, comes about because politicians do not say what they really mean.

The good thing about capitalism, so they say, is that you can climb up from paper boy to millionaire. But for each millionaire a large number of people must remain non-millionaires, although this is not mentioned. Arithmetic taught in primary school is sufficient to work this out.

In the same way, rich countries can only exist if there are also a great number of countries that are not rich. Again, this is not mentioned. Simple sums show that of the 28,000 deaths from hunger each day, a certain number are caused directly by the existence of a rich country such as the Netherlands. Conservatively, let us estimate this at 280 per day. Of course, this is not mentioned.

In other words, something which people don't consider an attractive freedom in their own country, namely murder, is considered acceptable internationally in the form of deaths from hunger. Business must go on, so freedom must be rejected as the foundation for organising the country, and rejected even more firmly as a foundation for organising the world economy.

But imagine for once that freedom was actually chosen as the foundation for a society. There are then two possible versions, a weak version and a strong version. In the weak version s-freedom is the foundation: in other words, all the i-freedoms that can be compatibly combined together form the foundation. Such a system would have massive consequences if introduced in our society, seeing as capitalism is not included in it. Nevertheless, it still does not get people to make space from time to time if there is not enough space for everyone on benches in the park.

In the strong version of freedom as a foundation for society, this problem is dealt with. I have called it ‘civilised’ when people divide up scarcity of their own accord. In the strong version of freedom as a foundation, this civilised behaviour needs to be included in some way or another in the organisation of society. How this can be done is not immediately obvious.

This point requires more investigation. John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), whose book ‘On Liberty’ I have studied while writing this book, pussyfoots around this issue, because for him, everything he said about freedom only applied to ‘people in the full maturity of their mental faculties’. For those considered immature, the state can interfere with their lives, according to Mill. No freedom for them.

16 THE STATE

Person no. 1: ‘It would be ok without a state.’

Person no. 2: ‘That would be a real mess.’

The first person could be from a variety of backgrounds. Around the 1920s in the Netherlands there was a small liberal party opposed to the state; there are also the right-wing libertarians, who strongly oppose the state because it stands too much in the way of capitalism. They are certainly not interested in s-freedom and I will not discuss them further. And then there are the anarchists, who sometimes call themselves libertarians when they want to avoid association with the way the average citizen and the average journalist use the word ‘anarchy’. This usage mostly refers to i-anarchy, while the majority

of anarchists use the word to refer to s-anarchy. Because the Greek word *arkhein* means ‘to rule’, anarchists use the word ‘anarchy’ to refer to a society where no one rules over another, while journalists use it to mean situations where a fairly small group of people wreak havoc with offensive weapons. This is itself a type of ruling (or misruling) over others, and could be called i-anarchy. The alternative meaning ‘without leadership’ (the Greek word *arkhein* also means ‘to lead’), also seems a bit strange to the average journalist. Leadership is something that you have to obey, and you’d be better off obeying the people with the offensive weapons, if you come across them.

But let us for a moment take the second person’s comment seriously. The speaker could mean two different things. Firstly: ‘if there was no state, then I would make a real mess of things’. It seems that the concept of ‘bad by nature’ lies behind this. What is remarkable is that I have also heard this comment from people who would never commit murder themselves, even if there was no state to threaten severe punishments. At least, that’s how it seems to me. Do they really mean what they say? Would they really start messing about as soon as there were no authorities to rein them in? I’m not so misanthropic that I could believe that.

The second interpretation is: ‘there will always be people who will make a real mess of things if there is nothing to keep them under control’. This seems to ring true to some extent. Or in any case, there are lots of people who make a real mess of things even with a state to threaten them, so without a state there might be people who would go even further, or so you could fear. The question is then how many of them there would be. Is it the five percent mentioned earlier, the five percent ‘baddies’? But some say that the percentage is so high specifically because there is a state to threaten them. People become rebellious and uncooperative as a reaction to this. Or people become uncooperative because the Dutch state itself seems to have no objection to 280 deaths per day as long as the deaths occur out of sight in a faraway country. Perhaps these are the bad consequences of setting a bad example?

But you can turn this around: a good example can have good con-

sequences. The reasoning goes that in a society where s-freedom forms the foundation, and even more so in a society where a civilised approach to dealing with scarcity is part of the culture, the percentage of profiteers and ‘bad guys’ would be very low indeed. This is because children would have a good upbringing, and such a society would be a nice place to be because you would learn from a young age that the type of freedom you choose should add up to freedom for society as a whole, and so forth.

Imagine that a society has s-freedom as its foundation and imagine there is a percentage of people who want to go outside the boundaries of this. In other words, they want i-freedoms which are not included in s-freedom. What must you do about this, i.e. what must society do about this? The usual solution is that the majority puts into place some sort of organisation to keep an eye on everything, to supervise the individuals who want to go outside the boundaries and keep them under control. In short, an administration, a government, a state or mini-state, a police force, or something similar.

At this point something funny happens. In a society whose foundation is freedom, there are very many i-freedoms which cause no problem at all on a societal level, so you can exercise these freedoms as much as you like. The state has no concern at all about these; the state is there only and exclusively to deal with the bad guys. The funny part is that those who work out for themselves what counts as s-freedom do not even notice the state. The state is not there for them.

This is quite a different type of state from the one we are used to.

17 DEMOCRACY

The state that we are used to is called a democracy. Looking at the history of how it came about, the question arises as to whether democracy in the current form (or forms—it is differently organised in each country) is the end-point of historical development or an intermediate step.

In most cases there was first an absolute monarch (king, emperor,

tsar, etcetera) surrounded by a swarm of advisers, boot-lickers, profiteers, smooth operators and suchlike. The monarch took great care of himself and the clique around him, but that irritated an awful lot of people. They managed to establish an elected parliament, but the first form of voting rights was based on wealth. Voting was restricted to those with a certain income or who owned a certain amount of land. As a result, participation in important decisions remained only available to those who were already able to take care of themselves very well, which often resulted in them pampering themselves even more.

That too irritated people. After yet more struggle, strikes and trouble, voting was extended to all people, where ‘people’ was equated to ‘men’. That is, men at least 21 years old, the age at which men are grown up (a fact I haven’t checked, by the way). This form of voting rights resulted again in those who were already able to take good care of themselves participating in decisions, and sexism was set down even more firmly in law.

That caused irritation. After yet more actions and trouble (the familiar story), universal voting rights were also opened to women. This immediately resulted in half of parliamentarians becoming women, half of the rulers becoming women, half of the mayors becoming women, etcetera—but not in reality. This causes irritation...

What next?

I will leave it at this point.

But first this. On the planet of a thousand people, there were two who took care of themselves very well in the material sense, namely, they became richer and richer. On the planet of a billion people, there were more than two, but otherwise the same thing happened. On Planet Earth, it plays out in a similar way. Rich countries take care that they stay rich, rich people in poor countries look after themselves well, as do the rich people in rich countries, and oddly, the laws are so arranged that this continues in a streamlined and well-oiled fashion both nationally and internationally.

Or in other words, it may be the case that during the course of history, more and more people got a finger in the democratic pie, but it is still the case that nothing is done that will seriously upset the

minority who are already well-off. And the *demos*, the people, the majority, are left to fend for themselves.

18 ONE MORE THAN 50%, OR EVERYONE

Democracy presents itself as a success story. Of course, democracy appears very good in comparison to dictatorships and absolute monarchies, but it does not follow from this that everyday democratic practices are all that wonderful.

The method of taking decisions via voting, for which fifty percent plus one is sufficient to decide, means that it can often happen that fifty percent minus one is dissatisfied. As well as causing dissatisfaction, this is not very productive on a social level.

Probably because democracy is mostly presented as ‘good’ rather than ‘dismal’, the democratic method of voting is often applied indiscriminately in all sorts of situations where it is really unhelpful to have an unsatisfied almost-majority. I’ve often seen it happen in a voluntary organisation that a committee acting like a government plus a members’ meeting acting like a parliament ended up making everyone dissatisfied, despite a precise application of democratic decision-making principles.

In another voluntary organisation, things happened quite differently. The organisation adopted a flat structure right from the start and never put anything to a vote. Fifty percent plus one was simply considered much too small a number to decide, instead they chose to include everyone. They made decisions by consensus, in other words. This resulted in more time to think through proposals, more amendments to proposals, and more time in meetings, but it also resulted in greater social cohesion because of less dissatisfaction.

Compared to this situation, conventional democracy is a really dismal system. It seems incomprehensible that democracy stands on a pedestal. It could really be much better than this.

The way a society is organised affects everyone and so you would expect that a decision on how to organise society would be taken by consensus, but the historical snippet in the previous chapter indi-

cates that each step of the long journey from absolute monarchy towards universal suffrage took a great deal of trouble to achieve. Never at any time anywhere in the world was it decided by consensus: ‘this is how we will organise society’.

19 OCCUPYING SPACES

The park bench was an example of scarcity: more people wanted to sit on the bench than there were spaces. There were two parties, those who occupied a space and those who didn’t (one person, in this case). Each of these parties could have reacted to the situation in two ways. The chip-eater could, for example, have asked if he could sit on the bench. As an answer, one of those sitting on the bench could have said yes, and then stood up to go for a walk. One of those sitting on the bench could even have done this before being asked. This sort of behaviour from both parties in response to scarcity results in an easy, friendly, streamlined way of doing things. If this sort of behaviour was common in every situation, there would have been no need to write this book, but of course other reactions are possible.

We saw how the chip-eater reacted in practice. He wanted to sit down at all costs, so he shoved someone off the bench and grabbed a space. In doing so, he shoved the disadvantage of the scarcity onto someone else, and caused an upset in the process.

This type of coexistence is not commonly encouraged. This form of exercising i-freedom cannot expect much support. And this type of i-freedom is certainly not s-freedom.

Those sitting on the bench could also have reacted differently to the friendly manner described above. They could all have wanted to remain seated at all costs. ‘This is my space and I will remain sitting here.’

Two parties, each with two different reactions, makes four possible combinations of roles. It can happen that people from both parties chose the friendly role. The role involving shoving can also occur,

but in many societies it is not tolerated. However, the fourth combination...

A youth sits in a train and turns on a radio. Why here, at this very moment? Why do you want to fill the whole space with your individual choice of music?

A musician wants to practice the saxophone and then play drums for a while. It is warm inside, the windows and doors go wide open and hey, the neighbours surely like it. But do they want it right at this moment?

You want to go from A to B, it is not so far, you could cycle it but you particularly want to go by car. And this makes a noise, spews out greenhouse gases and leads to a larger ecological footprint.

You want to go from C to D and take an aeroplane. The plane particularly wants to fly over an area of natural beauty, and for ten square kilometers of that area no-one can make proper recordings of the sounds of nature.

These examples show how it is very common for people to want to do one thing or another at all costs, with all sorts of direct consequences for others. But this cannot really be described as very civilised behaviour.

20 BEING BORN HERE OR THERE

Being born happens by accident. I don't mean the accident of a woman who did not want to become pregnant but did so accidentally. I mean that someone who is born does not choose their parents or the place they were born, or the circumstances of their parents or the district; in short, you accidentally end up somewhere. The young boy who is waiting to die of hunger cannot do anything about this, neither can the young boy who was born in room number 33 in a castle.

In his book 'A Theory of Justice', John Rawls (1921-2002) used the idea of the 'veil of ignorance' to come up with a concept of justice which is independent of circumstances determined by chance. To rephrase what he wrote, Rawls wants ideas for a just organisation

of society to be considered from the position of someone about to be born, who has no prior knowledge of circumstances or any other factors. Then you can theorise about what is just and unjust without being concerned about the gross national product, how much salary the parents get, etcetera. Then you can work out a theory of justice on the basis that you could well be born in a slum. In the principles of a theory of justice, 'no one should be advantaged or disadvantaged by natural fortune or social circumstances', Rawls writes.² It would be good if the young boys mentioned above could discuss their position, i.e. how they are advantaged or disadvantaged by natural fortune or social circumstances—but such discussions are rare. When there is scarcity or excess, which is what this is about of course, they are generally treated as if they are some sort of natural phenomena. Here is a river, so there is fresh water, so we can live here. Here is a well-filled bank account... So what?

You can make that money multiply itself, as happened on the planet of a thousand people.

You could also share out that money, dividing up the scarcity by dividing up your excess and sharing it out.

But sitting on money at all costs rather than sharing it out is extremely common.

21 CAPITALISM WITHOUT CONSENSUS

As I illustrated by the example of the planet of a thousand people, it is not so difficult to obtain more money if you already have a substantial amount in the bank. Via investment products such as interest, shares, deposits, savings accounts, investment funds and whatever else they are called, capital is multiplied without its owner lifting a finger.

'Where did the extra money come from?'

'From making investments in profitable enterprises'.

Oh. But an enterprise is just a structure: it does nothing on its own, and an investment does even less. I want to know where the money comes from in terms of actions carried out by real people.

'The investments make it possible for us to help unemployed people get jobs, and that results in increased productivity, which in turn increases sales and profits, part of which are paid to the investors.' Oh. On the planet of a thousand people, everyone had work, so I now want to know where the unemployed people came from. Were they all unemployed as a result of free will? Did they have the freedom not to be unemployed?

So many stories are spread around to proclaim the blessings of the capitalist free-market economy, but there are no stories to refute the extremely simple calculations relating to the planet of a thousand people. So where does the money come from? From the pockets of others.

And where does capitalism actually come from? The history of capitalism resembles to some extent the brief history of democracy that I described earlier. There were traders and profiteers and slaves. Slavery irritated people, so after a lot of effort it was abolished almost everywhere. Luckily there were many poor wretches who were prepared to work ridiculously long days, weeks and months for ridiculously low wages. Not for many years though, because they died young—read the footnotes in '*Das Kapital*' by Karl Marx (1818–1883), or read the impression of the industry in Aalst as described by Louis Paul Boon (1912–1979).³ But the child labour and the short lives of workers irritated people, so after much trouble and strikes, etcetera working times were reduced to a bearable number of hours. Child labour and short lifetimes were carefully exported to the colonies, but the existence of colonies irritated people, so after many wars, etcetera they obtained independence, as long as child labour and short lifetimes carried on in order to provide returns on capital obtained via colonialism.

It is difficult not to become very cynical about this. To cut a long story short, there has never been a conscious decision to introduce capitalism. Each time, people with money ensured that their money was looked after, and the capitalist system took shape as a result of this. No democratic decision has ever been made about what sort of economic system we want to have, let alone a decision by consensus, because the system affects everyone. Many details of the capitalist

way of doing things have also never been decided using a democratic route, and it is not expected that this will happen any time soon. Politicians have in any case substantial incomes of their own, which influences the way they think. I've often thought that members of the government should receive the minimum wage plus, to be generous, free first-class travel on public transport, since then you can at least be sure that they will govern based on concern for society rather than wanting to defend various special interests. However, members of the government who are rewarded in this way are likely to be very susceptible to being bribed. Current members of the government are not susceptible in this way, though you might wonder why they are unwilling to hold a referendum on the capitalist system. If that system is explained properly, using examples such as the planet of a thousand people, then it will be clear that it works to the disadvantage of the vast majority of people, and the result of such a referendum would be obvious.

Now to return to Rawls. His book about justice is so awkwardly written that I wonder who is likely to read it right through. It is a tangle of principles and premises and premises of principles, and quite remarkably in the middle of a long treatise about other matters, Rawls suddenly assumes 'that the economy is roughly a free market system, although the means of production may or may not be privately owned'.⁴ A few pages later Rawls supposes that 'under the standard assumptions defining a competitive market economy'⁵ there will be an efficient distribution of wealth, which the example of the planet of a thousand people shows to be untrue. In both cases, these are incidental comments in the middle of sentences, allowing market economy concepts to be hidden away amongst his arguments, although there is a lot worth discussing about them in the context of justice.

As mentioned earlier, a free market economy does not necessarily have to be a capitalist economy, and I am not happy about how Rawls deals with this issue in his research into the nature of justice. The capitalist version of the market economy is in any case one where economic inequalities between people tend to increase. How this is compatible with the concept of justice escapes me.

22 FREEDOM TO EXPRESS OPINIONS

Mill writes many pages about the freedom to express opinions. He includes the interesting observation that a generally accepted opinion degenerates into a ‘prejudice, with little comprehension or feeling of its rational grounds’,⁶ and so, even for a generally accepted idea, it is good that opposing voices can always be heard. This keeps the issue alive.

Mill dedicates so many words to this issue because in his time the freedom to express opinions was certainly not yet a concept embraced by the state or the church. One and a half centuries later, freedom of speech is put on a pedestal, at least in our society. Only a very few opinions are banned, and the most foolish, stupid, crude or beastly opinions are all allowed to be expressed publicly.

Most remarkable is that the freedom to not shake hands does not exist. In some professions it is compulsory to shake hands, as has been confirmed by the highest courts. Therefore, you are allowed to say that you do not want to shake the hands of certain people, you are free to express sexist reasons for not wanting to shake hands, but keeping your hands in your pockets is not allowed (I myself would put someone who doesn’t want to shake my hand in the same basket as the shifty characters whose hand I wouldn’t want to shake, but that is another matter).

Opinions are immaterial things and therefore totally harmless, or so you could say. Nevertheless, opinions can lead to hurt feelings, offence and similar things—but these too are immaterial things, so that does not matter, or so you could say. Opinions can, however, also destabilise a society by making an issue of things, making enemies, inciting violence and so forth.

In order to clarify this, it is a good idea not just to talk about freedom of speech, but to make a distinction between i-freedoms and s-freedoms when opinions are expressed. Every expression of an opinion involves exercising i-freedom. I defined freedom as doing what you want, but imagine a society where everyone spends the

whole day swearing. That is not the society that I want to live in. Evidently there are opinions which are i-freedom but not s-freedom, in other words, that on a societal level do not lead to the type of society that is desired. As well as swearing, these could include offensive opinions, fallacies and lies.

It remains extremely vague and crooked, but this is necessarily so. The cause of the vagueness is that opinions expressed are immaterial things, which means it is not easy to demonstrate that harm is being caused that is comparable to shoving someone off a park bench. On top of this, some people are so touchy that they can be offended by criticism before you realise it. Imagine, for example, a supporter of capitalism who cannot cope with my criticism of capitalism! I do not know if such sensitive capitalists exist, but criticism is an essential aspect and must be capable of being expressed.

In the story of the park bench I distinguished two civilised reactions, plus one reaction causing harm, plus the attitude of wanting to remain seated at all costs. The last of these falls within s-freedom but not within my narrower concept of civilised behaviour. Is there a difference between expression of opinions within s-freedom and civilised expression of opinions? This is so vague that I will not risk elaborating further, but I will say that in the case of many expressions of opinion, I wonder why anyone would specifically want to express an opinion in that particular form. It is a freedom which you have, but does it lead to the result that you want?

There is one thing which for me lies outside the area of civilised expressions, namely using false arguments. If education could ensure that people could read and write, that they could do enough arithmetic to be able to follow the story of the planet of a thousand people, that they could avoid using false arguments, that they could distinguish correct generalisations from incorrect ones—what a consequence this would have for society!

23 STATIC OR DYNAMIC ORDER

Earlier I wrote that there are two strategies for protecting society against unpleasant things: prohibiting a wide range of i-freedoms, or using s-freedom as the foundation for organising a society. The set of i-freedoms is enormous, the set of s-freedoms forms a subset of this and within the set of s-freedoms there is again a subset containing freedoms that can be termed civilised.

I also made the observation that there will always be some people who will make a mess of things. Given that the overwhelming majority of people doesn't want a mess, the overwhelming majority is likely to think up something to stop the mess-makers creating a mess. One possibility, then, is to make a list of prohibited freedoms, plus an authority to watch out for breaches of the prohibitions, plus authorities to deal with the mess-makers.

In some societies, everything is prohibited that is not explicitly allowed, while in others, everything is allowed that is not explicitly prohibited. The first type of society seems very unattractive to me, and I will not discuss it further, as freedom plays no role in the foundations of such a society. For the second type, a distinction can be made between two sub-types. While the list of prohibited freedoms is aimed at ensuring order, the concept of order can be interpreted statically or dynamically.⁷ Static order implies that if something is prohibited, then it will always be prohibited. Dynamic order implies that while something may be prohibited, if someone breaches the ban without disturbing public order then this does not matter. Think, for example, of a cyclist who goes through a red light on a Sunday morning when there is no traffic to be seen anywhere around, or an old lady who cycles in a pedestrian zone to get closer to a shop, or a small child who cycles in a pedestrian zone.

What about the last of these situations? This could be used as the basis for a good example of the difference between i-freedom and s-freedom. Some people who sometimes cycle through a pedestrian zone, for whatever reasons, go slowly and always give priority to

pedestrians, as the pedestrian zone is for them. This is a socially acceptable form of cycling, s-freedom in other words. Others tear through the zone, thinking, 'here I am, I want to cycle through here at all costs, and the pedestrians must jump out of my way': a form of i-freedom which disturbs public order. This second type of cyclist is more likely to get a ticket than the first type—although you sometimes come across a police officer who hasn't yet handed out his or her monthly quota of tickets and so uses a static concept of order to achieve the target more easily.

Citizens who take part in civil disobedience are following the dynamic concept of order. They consider that something is unjustly prohibited. When traffic increased, the number of one-way streets in cities was also increased. Cyclists ignored one-way streets en masse, this subsequently became legalised, and in a city such as Utrecht, nearly all streets that are one-way for motor vehicles now allow cycling in both directions.

Other examples of civil disobedience had less successful outcomes. People who didn't want to pay for the army got short shrift. Although it is hard to argue that those who refused to pay were disturbing public order, in this case the static concept of order applied. Who is the judge of this?

24 REVENGE AND GRUDGES, OR ABOLITION

Every prohibition has a corresponding punishment, or so it is said. Breaching a minor prohibition results in a minor punishment, and for a more serious one, a more serious punishment: deprivation of liberty.

What a good phrase.

There is an interesting school of thought amongst criminologists and others, known as abolitionism. This word was commonly used in the past in the context of the abolition of slavery, but modern-day abolitionists call for abolition of prisons. One of the arguments for this is that it is often the case that someone goes into prison as a petty thief and comes out as a master burglar. Where else would

you find a collection of villains in order to study the higher arts of villainy?

Another argument is that a prison sentence is intended as a punishment for the suffering caused by the perpetrator, but the punishment itself causes suffering to the perpetrator. Some of those punished may indeed turn their back on crime to avoid further punishment, but a larger proportion of them end up with feelings of resentment against society. And resentment is a bad counsellor when it comes to deciding whether or not to leave the path of crime.

However, let us suppose that there are people who should really not be let loose in society. I fear that such people do in fact exist. They commit a crime, get caught, appear before a judge and the judge decides that they have forfeited their place in society and must be given a prison sentence.

They must, of course, not experience this as if it was a hotel, so it is said.

Oh? Why not?

If the society someone is part of decides that they are an enemy of society, then surely society does not need to act like an enemy to them? The aim of the imprisonment was to protect society against a particular individual, so the more a villain prefers to be in prison because it is like a hotel, the better for everyone.

In the chapter covering my definition of 'civilisation', I called a culture where vendettas are normal, leading to murder upon murder upon murder, uncivilised. The element of revenge in the current criminal justice system seems a little like this: the reaction to the rough nature of a crime must contain a rough element. In other words, a cell should be bare and horrible, and not like a hotel room. To me, this seems like something from the Old Testament or pre-Germanic tribes, or maybe something even older. In any case, it is not a high-principled standpoint.

If the function of a prison is prevention of crime, in other words safeguarding society against repeat offences, then a prison needs to be organised in such a way as to maximize the preventative function rather than the chance of resentful offenders.

All the same, this is not real prevention. Real prevention would not

involve trying to avoid offences being repeated, but to avoid the offence being committed in the first place. This is certainly a difficult thing, but it is good that abolitionists are sinking their teeth into this tricky issue. The route of revenge is far too lazy, and in any case has nothing to do with the theme of freedom.

25 FOUR CONSIDERATIONS

Putting together a list of prohibitions with associated punishments was one strategy, making s-freedom a foundation of society was the other. S-freedom as an absolute minimum, I should say.

A combination of both strategies is of course another possibility, resulting in a society founded on s-freedom where enormous lists of prohibitions hang on each street corner. But I want to highlight the more attractive side of the concept of s-freedom and the fact that it is not so difficult to work out for yourself the likely consequences of your behaviour. For this, there are four considerations to weigh up and take into account.

First of all: causing misery. Shoving someone off a park bench, poisoning a bad neighbour, that sort of thing. This sort of behaviour may be useful for reaching an individual aim, but even the biggest scoundrel would realise that it is not social behaviour.

Secondly: causing misery somewhere out of sight. Child labour may be considered unacceptable unless it occurs in a faraway country, because that keeps a pair of trousers affordable. The use of certain pesticides may be forbidden for health reasons, but their production and export remains legal. Financial flows may cause deaths from hunger elsewhere. These are the sorts of things I mean. Specific knowledge is sometimes needed to determine the faraway consequences of local actions, but the basic principle is very simple: if you don't want something to happen here, don't make it happen elsewhere. Individual aims such as a cheap pair of trousers or money flowing in your direction are not things that need to happen come what may.

Thirdly: part of the previous two considerations involves examining

whether i-freedoms are additive, i.e. if something is an s-freedom or not, but you can also look at whether exercising your freedoms causes scarcity even though it does not cause misery. Visiting a famous painting such as Rembrandt's 'Night Watch' isn't something that everyone can do at the same time, but by spreading visits throughout the year, there is plenty of opportunity for everyone who wishes to see it, i.e. no scarcity. In the park, on the other hand, there were too few spaces for everyone to sit on benches, i.e. scarcity.

Fourthly: in situations where there is scarcity, you can think about whether or not you want to share it out.

The first consideration is not so difficult, and many people will do this of their own accord, deciding not to directly cause misery in ways such as this. As I said earlier, I think that a large number of people avoid certain undesirable activities of their own accord, not just because of the punishment associated with them.

The second consideration is quite different. It concerns the choice between prioritising i-freedom or s-freedom. In a capitalist culture this is not a common consideration; such things are mostly left for the market to decide. Sometimes one or other i-freedom is considered such an abuse that after endless discussions, delays and haggling it finally gets dealt with, but mostly only partially. Look at the case of child labour in faraway countries, for example.

The third consideration is also not really included in today's culture. Scarcity is more or less seen as a natural phenomenon. People tend not to think about whether or not they are causing scarcity. For all ecological issues, this is the crucial consideration which needs to be made. The tricky part is making a decision between 'a bit more' or 'a bit less'; a simple yes/no decision of whether to do something is much easier. Although tricky, this third consideration is certainly well within the thinking capacity of *Homo sapiens*.

You can see this from the fourth consideration. It is common for people to stand up to make space for someone else on a seat in a park, a wood, a train or a bus. I have used the word 'civilised' (in a narrow sense) for this type of behaviour, in other words, for behaviour where all four considerations are made. It seems, though, that this sort of behaviour tends to happen in response to relatively triv-

ial matters and when the consequences of behaviour can be directly seen. You can easily see what is happening on a park bench, but not in the whole world.

Whether or not to cause misery, cause misery in faraway places, cause scarcity, and share out scarcity: with these four considerations, the full set of possible freedoms is divided into four subcategories (see the diagram at the end of this text). One part of the set of possible freedoms (indicated with 'r' in the diagram) is connected to misery, one part with misery primarily in faraway countries, one part with increase of scarcity and finally there is a part involving dividing up scarcity. Another way of describing it is in terms of taking away freedom, taking away freedom elsewhere, hindering freedom and dividing up space for freedom.

All of these are considerations that are not hugely difficult for human brains to cope with, and do not need to be handed over to committees of experts or legislators to decide for us. Do it yourself!

26 THE MURKY MACHINATIONS OF MONEY

For the first consideration in the previous chapter, the issue was whether you want to be a thief, scoundrel, villain, rober, pirate or something similar. It concerns a wide range of things that are considered uncivilised just about everywhere.

For the second consideration, the issue is how you want to treat people from faraway countries. The planet of a thousand people was a small, finite, closed system, the Earth is likewise a finite, closed system, but countries on Earth are open systems. All these countries talk as if they are capable of endless economic growth and as if their economic activities have purely positive effects on the other side of the planet. But their economic activities can help cause soil degradation, deforestation, erosion, floods, climate problems, war or poverty.

In the example of the planet of a thousand people I concentrated on the last of these: poverty. The economy there was a money-based economy, which was organised so that a small amount of money

continually flowed out of the pockets of the thousand people into the pockets of the two rich people. Simple arithmetic showed this. Simple acts caused it: putting money in the bank, consulting the stock market page, accumulating interest—acts which do not resemble the uncivilised activities within the scope of behaviour of thieves and pirates.

But in the long term...

On the planet of a billion people, and certainly on Planet Earth, what happens to money is anything but transparent. The banks try to convince everyone who has a spare bit of money to put it into an interest-bearing account, invest it or put it into a fund. If you do this, then money flows in your direction of its own accord. If you don't do it, then you are stealing from your own purse. But as shown in the example of the planet of a thousand people, receiving interest, dividends, etcetera is equivalent to stealing from someone else's purse.

The Dutch government assumes that you are stealing from someone else's purse if you have spare money. A few years ago people who received interest paid tax on the interest they received, but now, if you have more than a certain amount of money in the bank, you have to pay tax even if you have looked for a way not to receive interest, i.e. when you have tried to avoid stealing from someone else's purse or wallet. It is not very civilised of the government to do this. The government played an even less civilised role when Aktie Strohalm⁸ wanted to set up an interest-free fund where people who don't want to steal from someone else's purse could put their surplus money. The government said at the time that they would consider this money as money which interest could have been received on, and therefore that tax needs to be paid on it. If you don't steal from someone else's purse, the government steals from yours instead.

In order to set up that interest-free fund, Strohalm was in negotiation with one of the few banks that is a bit civilised, the Dutch ASN Bank. Nevertheless, that same bank also issued advertising material containing words such as 'highest interest', 'best return' and suchlike. When I contacted the bank about this, I received a reply from the board that my criticism was accurate... and that was

that. I would have expected that such a bank might offer different accounts, explaining that for people who want to receive maximum interest at all costs they offer an account called such-and-such, but for those who abhor interest there is a different account. 'Come to us, interest-free accounts available!' they might say.

27 RULING IDEAS AND OTHER IDEAS

A simple, neutral and broad definition of 'ideology' is that it is a set of ideas. According to that definition everyone has an ideology, which can be anything from elaborate to confused, from considered-at-length to adopted from the surroundings where you happen to be born.

A narrower definition is that ideology is a set of ideas that someone wants to cram into someone else. In this case, 'someone' can be the state, the church, parents, pastors, vicars, imams, employers, the Party. This rather vicious definition tends to be used, for example, in sentences about the 'communist state ideology'. In this case it is explicitly or implicitly implied that communist states are rogue states because they try to poison innocent people of all ages with a particular ideology.

Recently, many decades after leaving school (I was born in 1950), I re-read my old schoolbooks. It is astonishing how many subtle ideological phrases I came across. 'Despite the fact that the development of Negroes has significantly advanced, many Americans do not consider them to be full members of society.'⁹ This implies that Negroes are not Americans. Or about non-whites in South Africa: 'Because they are greatly in the majority compared to white immigrants, this gave rise to the so-called native problem... Negroes can live more cheaply than white people and so work for lower wages. The black worker is therefore a serious competitor to the white worker. Therefore, Negroes are not admitted to certain professions.'¹⁰ Causes and effects are badly mixed up with each other here. These were not ideology free books, and today's schoolbooks are also not ideology free. A story such as the planet of a thousand

people would not appear in them and, I fear, they will not mention anywhere what the current state ideology is in the field of economics. This ideology probably runs right through the schoolbooks, so that innocent children never get to hear whose purses they might be stealing from once they become adults. In a current geography book¹¹ there is a chapter on inequality (which is good), and a section on famine (which is also good), listing examples of causes of famine such as natural disasters. Plus: ‘Famine can also often have a human cause, namely war’. However, there is nothing about unequal economic starting positions and how the prevailing world economy increases inequalities.

A state which effectively makes it compulsory to receive interest has a state ideology.

The same is true of a state which talks of ‘improving our competitive position’, which on a finite planet with a finite number of countries means that the competitive position of a number of other countries would need to worsen.

‘Competitive’ is a word that Rawls quietly introduces in his philosophical system part-way through a sentence, as I mentioned earlier. Perhaps he intended a neutral interpretation of that word, but there is a good chance that he was sneaking the ruling ideology into his system. Precisely because it is the state ideology, not many people are likely to take offence at this, if they notice it at all.

Concerning ideas in the field of economics, Marx is still right: the ruling ideas are the ideas of the ruling class.¹² For ideas in another field, the ruling ideas may well be those that political parties agree with out of fear of losing votes.

28 COUNTRIES ACT AS IF DETACHED

Let us go back to the four considerations from chapter 25. The second consideration, about causing misery in faraway countries, is not taken into account much in regions where the state ideology does not promote it. For those distracted by the double negative in the previous sentence, it is the case that capitalist ideologues do not

want to think about faraway countries, except of course as places to make money from.

One of the causes of the problems in faraway countries is ingrained in the concept of ‘country’. A state can act as if a country is a self-contained entity. The consequences elsewhere of a country’s own economic actions are never noted down, mentioned, planned or improved.

For someone born in today’s world, the concept of country seems to be a sort of natural fact. In the atlas there is one kind of map with different coloured blotches indicating what kind of vegetation grows in each place, and another with different coloured blotches indicating countries—but the two types of blotches are not comparable. National borders are related to which warlords (or ladies, but mostly lords) once waged war or which marriages took place at the top of the nobility. The possessions of grand-dukes or kings were often related to the repercussions arising from regions being appropriated by land-grabbers. This is not such a pleasant history. It often leads to national borders that are very awkwardly drawn, e.g. unrelated to language borders, which in turn often leads to various episodes of disorder between argumentative types.

In prehistoric times, there were groups of perhaps thirty people who wandered around nomadically together, and that was their entire society. These groups interacted with other groups in various ways, friendly or otherwise, varying from falling in love to bartering to headhunting. With the discovery of agriculture, people started to settle and specialise—oh, that story is widely known, and I have nothing special to say about it.

As groups became larger, bigger problems could happen when ruthless types (men or women, but mostly men) managed to get their way. With today’s countries, the expansion of groups of people has come to a halt, but the expansion of trade has not halted at all, resulting in a global economy.

And that causes bad feeling.

Countries, or at least some of them, put their hope in endless economic growth, although our planet remains finite. By ignoring the effects elsewhere, they can make sure that their economy grows all

the time. All the same, one country's economy is bound together with the rest of the world in a variety of ways, both in a locally positive sense (supposing that growth in riches is something positive) and in a worldwide negative sense.

For example, somewhere else there is an 'extra Netherlands', a land area the size of the Netherlands where fodder is grown for the cows in Dutch meadows.

That district is indispensable for the flows of money in the Netherlands, but the workers there don't get the Dutch minimum wage, standard of healthcare or level of pension. In short, it closely resembles the role of the plantations in the former Dutch East Indies—faraway countries exist for profit.

29 WHY TAKE UP A LOT OF SPACE?

The third consideration in chapter 25 involved whether or not to cause scarcity. The story of the park bench involved taking up a seating place, i.e. space. Many other things besides space can be scarce, but I will concentrate on taking up space.

In the park, if it's a beautiful day you can run like a hare to get the first free place on a bench and stay sitting there until the sun goes down. At a concert where seats are not reserved, you can use the interval to obtain a better place for yourself—at the Early Music Festival in Utrecht you could carry out very interesting studies of this type of behaviour from an audience which probably thinks of itself as belonging to the civilised part of the nation.

As well as actual space in the form of square metres and hectares, you could also talk about acoustic space. If you speak, the idea is to reach those you are talking to, and that usually works out. But you can also make extra noise and thereby cause others to be unable to carry on a conversation as they would like. Playing music loudly with the windows open, despite there being a simple solution in the form of headphones, is one example. Another is playing music that is unamplified but nevertheless loud, again with the windows open. Or carrying out a very loud conversation in a space where there

are many other people—on trains it seems that those who talk the loudest say the least interesting things. The car is a patented noise-pollution machine, the motorbike is often quite a bit worse, and the airplane can compete with both of them. For contraptions such as these, you could argue for restricting their space of influence, with no use of these noise-machines outside of designated roads and air traffic routes: now there is no place left in the Netherlands where it is silent—in the village of Eemnes, the designated 'silent zone' is right next to the motorway!

There is also such a thing as 'nasal space' or odour nuisance. Farting under someone's nose is not considered decent, but until recently the smell of smoke was nearly everywhere, even in places where those who considered themselves decent people gathered—look at old photos of groups of dignitaries, scientists or artists. Smokers are now very much on the back foot, but mostly not because of criticism of the nasal space they take up. Next to my house, visitors would sit outside smoking on sunny days, and if I was cooking—a task requiring careful use of the nose—I quickly shut the door to the garden, because the quality of the hundred cubic metres of air around me was determined by the neighbours. The i-freedom to behave stupidly might be allowed, but what about the i-freedom to determine the quality of many cubic metres of air? Smoking bans should focus mainly on this issue. The same is true for other smells, I am not sure what I find worse when sitting in a busy train, a smoker sitting next to me or someone surrounded by a cloud of perfume.

In chapter 19 I touched on the question which concerns me here: why would you want to take up so much space? Why would you want to increase scarcity? That is, after all, what it comes down to: taking possession of a substantial extra piece of scarce space, whether it is square metres, cubic metres, auditive or nasal. One individual takes it from another, and one country takes it from another.

30 ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT

By now everyone must have heard of the concept of ecological footprint (also called global footprint). The idea behind it is simple: only a certain number of hectares of the Earth can be made use of by people, the number of people on Earth is known, divide one by the other and a number is produced. Just under two hectares is available per person. This is called our ‘fair share’ of the world’s usable area. When calculating your ecological footprint, you need to look at how many square metres is taken up by your home, garden, as well as the land where the grain and potatoes that you consume are grown, a very small piece of nature reserve, etcetera. It is difficult to calculate it very accurately and some details are debatable, but the basic idea is simple: you live on Earth, you are not alone, and the Earth is finite.

Someone who considers the North American lifestyle as an ideal and is happy to allow everyone to live in this way is effectively assuming that five planet Earths are available, because the footprint associated with this lifestyle is around nine hectares. Someone who promotes the average Dutch lifestyle and is happy to allow everyone to live in this way is effectively assuming that there are two planet Earths. This is really quite unrealistic.

The usual solution to this question chosen by the average rich person is not to allow others the space. The question is once again: why would you want to live in this way?

The fourth consideration from chapter 25 concerns this, namely the choice of whether or not you want to share out existing scarcity. Some things are scarce by their nature. There were not enough benches for everyone in the park, but you could say this was ‘by accident’ as there might have been enough benches. The situation is different in the case of the available space on Earth as the planet is finite and you can’t add an extra piece to it in the way that you can add more benches to the park. The usual way of doing things, as noted above, is that rich countries and rich people continue with

large ecological footprints and thereby prevent other people from enlarging their footprints. It might be a good idea if rich countries and rich people explicitly admitted that this is indeed their solution to the problem.

A more civilised solution is to cut one’s coat according to one’s cloth. In 40 years the world population has doubled, and so the fair share of the Earth’s area has halved. The size of population and lifestyle are inextricably connected to one another via the ecological footprint; if you want an extravagant lifestyle then an appeal for a smaller population goes along with it. There are various easy ways of reducing the population, but all of them are very crude. Wars are one effective way, others include allowing epidemics of deadly diseases to break out (or making medicines too expensive) or sterilisation campaigns run by the state—although the last of these only works over a longer period. What shall we do?

The only easy way that is also civilised is to adapt your lifestyle so that your footprint is less than the fair-share figure. I know how this is possible, it is not so difficult and you can still live a fulfilling life, but for the time being I fear that the average Dutch person is likely to be against it. Maybe they think: ‘It’s not my fault when some people are born in poor countries’.

31 INDIVIDUALISM

Mill’s book ‘On Liberty’ only has five chapters and one of them is entitled ‘Of Individuality, as One of the Elements of Well-Being’. His concern was that ‘society has now fairly got the better of individuality’,¹³ meaning that when considering their thoughts and choosing their preferences, people tend to choose what ‘one’ thinks or does, i.e. what others think and do. ‘He who does anything because it is the custom, makes no choice.’¹⁴ ‘It does not occur to them to have any inclination, except for what is customary. Thus the mind itself is bowed to the yoke.’¹⁵ ‘[...] it is only the cultivation of individuality which produces, or can produce, well-developed human beings.’¹⁶

His appeal in 1859 was not able to prevent there being times when masses of people all held their right arms diagonally in the air while shouting slogans, nor that there were regions where only very specific opinions were allowed, nor that there were countries where everyone wore the same suits.

All the same, one and a half centuries later something has happened, and from time to time social problems are ascribed to pervasive individualism. But is that so? These allegations concern various forms of me-me-me, brash extravagance or greed. If this is included in individualism, then it is a totally different form of individualism than the one Mill described with his ‘well-developed human beings’.

Individualism is once again a word than can be interpreted in various ways. The disadvantage of Mill’s interpretation is that he first includes positive ideals such as ‘well-developed’ which he can praise without reservations. The problem is how to get everyone to internalise these positive ideals. But who determines what is positive? Most of all, what if there are people who simply won’t adopt these positive ideals?

A neutral interpretation of individualism seems better to me. This would be similar to the neutral interpretation of freedom with which I began this book: individualism means that individuals think for themselves what they want.

There are people who will think of antisocial actions, leading to problems in society. The cause of these problems lies then not with individualism but with the antisocial actions.

Individualism can also lead to other thoughts. There are people who think up all sorts of co-operative activities, such as helping their neighbours. They think it up themselves, this is part of individualism and causes no problems at all for society.

In slightly different words, one of the options for human beings is to look after their own skins; me-me-me and similar behaviour falls into this category. These are things which lead to sayings such as ‘people are bad by nature’. But humans have other options, looking after others and similar behaviour leads to the idea that people could be good by nature.

The point is that both the problematic and socially useful options

can take form in a very individual manner. In other words, individualism can lead in all directions.

32 COLLECTIVISM

Mill wrote ‘even in what people do for pleasure, conformity is the first thing thought of; [...] they exercise choice only among things commonly done: peculiarity of taste, eccentricity of conduct, are shunned equally with crimes’.¹⁷

The opposite of individualism is adaptation to the collective. People often laughed about the way people were forced to toe the party line in Maoist China, where everyone wore virtually the same clothes, but if you look at a photo of a trade agreement or peace treaty being signed by Europeans, you note firstly that those in the photo are mostly men, and secondly that they are all dressed more or less the same. In China it used to be dangerous to stand out, to do something individual, but what about here?

In addition, the Europeans all have a useless piece of cloth knotted around their necks. That is reminiscent of other ritual pieces of cloth, the headscarves which for a long time were compulsory for Catholic women going to church, and which are still in vogue for nuns and for members of some other religions. Religions can have a very conformist influence, and when a religion becomes the state religion it can be blown out of all proportion. If it is a religion which is devised in a patriarchal or otherwise sexist society, then sexism is likely to persist for a long time thanks to the holy books.

For state doctrines or state ideologies, the same is of course true as for religions. Dictators also like to use laws to prescribe things that a state ought to keep well away from. If they even prescribe the contents of schoolbooks, as both religions and dictators like to do, then there is not much room left over for individuality.

By the way, you also see this in a weaker form with secular democratic politicians, who sometimes quickly withdraw a remark when it turns out not to be in agreement with the party line. When they

do this, such politicians and their parties give me the impression of being extraordinarily unreliable.

Collectives like to curtail the freedom of their members to think what they want and do what they want, but on the other hand, individuals of course have the freedom to submerge themselves in a collective. The reason why I mention this here is because of the question of why you would want to increase scarcity, why you would want to take up a lot of space (the third consideration).

Because the collective says so?

Because Mum and Dad say so?

Because the pastor, vicar or imam says so?

Because the majority says so?

Because the state says so?

33 KEEPING UP WITH THE NEIGHBOURS

Or because the neighbours also do it.

Those who say that we live in very individualistic times have not really taken a good look around. I see an inordinate number of people voluntarily going along with what others do.

John Stuart Mill reasoned that individuality consists of development, which leads to diversity. Later in his book, remarkably, he turned the argument around: he claimed that lack of diversity is not good, and in this context even talks about ‘influences hostile to Individuality’.¹⁸ But that is not necessarily the case. When there is a state doctrine that promotes toeing the party line and people no longer dare to stick out from the crowd and all walk around in the same suits, then it is the lack of diversity which gives food for thought. But it could also be the case that after thinking about it, everyone comes to the conclusion that unbleached eco-cotton is the best thing to make your clothes from, which results in a loss of diversity but an increase in prudence. The same is true for the park bench. If everyone thinks about such a situation and comes to the conclusion that shoving someone off the bench is not acceptable,

then it seems to me that this lack of diversity is likely to be welcomed by everyone.

All the same, it often happens that people behave similarly to their neighbours simply because the neighbours behave that way. Perhaps they want a big car just like the neighbours, preferably one that is a bit longer, wider, higher and faster.

This sort of thing actually does happen.

To me, this is a false individualism.

As long as it’s about the colours of ties or panties, oh well. But when it’s about who makes the biggest contribution to climate change, then it’s different, because that ultimately affects all other people who live on Earth.

If people do something in order to belong to some group, then they give up part of their individuality. People may want to belong to the majority—indeed, the majority has a tendency to do this—but even if someone wants to belong to a nonconformist minority, this is a sort of conformism; a bunch of people who all have mohican haircuts, for example.

But this is a freedom which one has.

One thing is to do something because the neighbours do it, another is not to do it because the neighbours don’t do it. There is plenty of knowledge of changes in behaviour that are effective in reducing CO₂ emissions. Still, many people do not want to change unless they are sure that many others will change too. ‘What sort of fool do they think I am?’ they exclaim, and in the meantime, they give up part of their individuality.

This is also a freedom which one has.

Something that puzzles me is why you would want to refrain from doing something because the neighbours don’t do it. Using a bicycle instead of a car, going on holiday by bus or train instead of flying. People sometimes say that these are good ideas, yet they only make the change once many others also do so. Does jealousy lie behind this? If so, what are they envious of? Are they jealous of the i-freedoms of the neighbours, who travel from door to door protected from the elements, while you get rained on once every fourteen times if you cycle (in the Netherlands, it rains seven percent of the

time)? But on the scale of individuality and the scale of development the neighbours score less, to say nothing of the scale of noise and size of ecological footprint. On top of this, the neighbours have to go to a gym to work off their excess kilos on an exercise bike while not moving so much as one centimetre forward.

34 GREEDILY HOARDING

The second consideration from chapter 25 was the consideration of whether or not to cause misery elsewhere. In reality, people's considerations do not include the term 'misery' at all, they tend to be considerations of the form, 'shall I go for 'Extra Savings Plus' account from bank A or 'Plus Savings Extra' account from bank B?' This seems to be an innocent choice, and the banks do not tell you what happens to the money, if they know it at all; the newspapers don't say either, at least not on the business pages, and the government is silent as the grave on this matter.

So, how would you know that your seemingly innocent considerations could lead to deaths from hunger elsewhere? There is only talk of investments, returns, share prices, the stock market index, the state of the country's economy, the budget, the figures for economic growth. All this is told as if that's the way it is, that it can't be any other way, that it is so of necessity.

But all the state ideologists of all the dictators said the same thing. If capitalism was so wonderful, then after one and a half to two centuries of capitalism, the world should have been rid of hunger. But it doesn't seem very rosy, on top of the hundred million deaths which have already occurred, there are likely to be millions more. That is, as long as the flows of money from poor to rich people are kept in place. Unfortunately, it doesn't look like the underlying greed behind capitalism is about to go out of fashion.

Evolutionarily speaking, it is undoubtedly the case that a certain amount of hoarding and a certain amount of avarice are useful for surviving unfavourable periods. Evolutionarily speaking, it is also the case that we are primarily adapted to living in small groups. In

small groups, the consequences of excess individual avarice would however be immediately visible, and I suspect that this behaviour is rarely if ever present. But nowadays 'the group' comprises the entire world population and it seems that human brains have not evolved to the extent of being able to count to seven or ten billion.

Without too much exaggeration, you could say that people in rich countries nowadays mostly think with their wallets rather than with their brains. You see this on several levels. Publishers reckon that it is cheaper to print something in Hong Kong and ship it here, although that turns out to be ecologically more expensive (the printed version of this text was printed in the Netherlands). If there are electronics shops on both sides of the street, of which one is more knowledgeable and helpful but is more expensive, then it is likely that a lot of people will go there to get the information and then buy the goods from the cheaper shop across the road—with the consequences that the better shop goes bankrupt. Simply because organically grown vegetables are more expensive it is likely that they will never massively catch on, even though there is a good reason that they are called 'organic'. Because of people thinking with their wallets, the number of common butterflies is likely to diminish, and gradually people are forgetting how many butterflies there used to be. The usual forms of agriculture and horticulture, amongst other things, have led to it becoming usual for the butterfly population to be in a sorry situation.

Not a single bank offers an anti-greed account. Newspapers, even those considering themselves quality newspapers, publish a lot about stock market prices, but not, I imagine, in order to arouse people to give their money away. I could however be wrong, as I must confess that I have never read a single letter on the greed pages.

A certain amount of hoarding may be useful, but how much is 'a certain amount'? As long as the world is not rid of hunger, some people have clearly taken up too large a space, and by hoarding they have exercised all manner of i-freedoms that cannot be s-freedoms. Hoarding behaviour of all sorts does not add up on a worldwide

scale. So why would you want to preserve such behaviour? Where is the fun in greed?

35 LAZINESS—TAKING THE EASY WAY

But then there is something else, the third consideration, about causing scarcity in the case of harmless scarcity that causes no misery elsewhere, i.e. no deaths from hunger.

The boundary between causing or not causing misery in a faraway land is not always obvious, because it is not obvious whether the scarcity you are causing will have an effect on the other side of the world. If you want a 20 percent return on a foreign investment, then you are contributing to a flow of money from poor to rich. But if you buy cocoa from Ecuador or sports shoes from Indonesia, you don't know if they were produced in a civilised manner. Do the workers get a reasonable wage? Can they join a trade union or is that prohibited? Are the cocoa plantations sprayed with chemicals from the air while the workers are around? Do the shoemakers work with poisonous substances, and is there proper protection and fume extraction? You don't know about details such as these, and if you buy something you assume that everything is in order. That makes it easy for you so that you are free to do your shopping. The supermarket looks civilised, so all products sold there must be produced in a civilised manner—or so you hope.

But that hope is often in vain.

Ecological footprints (see chapter 30) are become quite a bit bigger thanks to laziness.

For evolution, it's not just a certain level of hoarding that is useful, a certain level of laziness is undoubtedly useful too. Sitting on your backside, not using energy unnecessarily—animals often do it. That's what their life is like: eating, feeding, lazing about, reproducing a bit.

With humans, it can go wrong in two ways. One is when there is too much lazing around and also too much eating. I'm writing this in the morning, sitting in bed with my laptop on my lap, which is

very pleasant. This involves plenty of mental exertion but no physical exertion. Physically it's laziness. I make sure that I get enough physical exertion at other times and don't stuff myself with food, but not all people in rich countries manage this. They spend too much time taking it easy, and in doing so, they greatly exceed the level of laziness that was evolutionarily useful.

The second way in which it can go wrong is that laziness is magnified by not using your own energy but energy from coal, oil, gas or uranium. Someone may first eat a lot to get plenty of energy reserves in order to move about a lot, but then they take the escalator, lift or car, day in, day out.

There is a lot of freedom of choice and it is apparently not so easy to avoid choosing the easy way. In the Netherlands, there is no scarcity of cars, and so no scarcity of CO₂ which is blown into the atmosphere. Of course it is easy not to cycle to the city but to go by car, but if this choice is made all over the world it would mean that more than one world is needed in terms of ecological footprint. Why would you choose such behaviour? Where is the fun in laziness?

36 ADDICTED TO OIL

Obesity is such a well-recognised problem that there are a variety of campaigns to persuade people to become more physically active, eat less, etcetera. Using too much oil, which is very similar to eating too much food, is not dealt with in the same way. Campaigns tend to take different routes. As I write this, in October 2009, there have been 101,800 deaths on Dutch roads since I was born in March 1950. I can't help noticing that by sheer coincidence this is the same as the number of deaths of Dutch Jews in the Second World War that were caused by the Nazi occupiers.¹⁹ Traffic deaths occurred at a much slower rate (one-fifteenth as fast), but still resulted in the equivalent of an entire city becoming victims of laziness and addiction to oil. Does freedom to drive really provide a road to happiness? In 1972, the report of the Club of Rome was published. Environmental actions had already taken place, but the Club of Rome put environ-

mental issues definitively on the map by highlighting the fact that fossil fuels are finite sources of energy. They are finite, and therefore scarce, and will eventually become extremely scarce.

Twenty years later, in 1992, the United Nations climate treaty was signed in Rio de Janeiro. Some people had already drawn attention to changes in the atmosphere from waste gases from fossil fuels, but from that moment climate issues were definitively on the agenda. It is not just that fossil fuels are a scarce commodity, their influence on the climate is not zero, quite the contrary.

Now a further twenty years have passed, the moment of ‘Peak Oil’²⁰ is nearby or has possibly already been reached. This means that the production of crude oil can only decrease. This will lead to price increases, the costs of which will most likely not be borne by the broadest shoulders, as in a capitalist world it is normal for the heaviest weights to fall on the shoulders of those who are already struggling.

You can of course follow the climate sceptics, but their thinking boils down to the belief that CO₂ comes from nowhere, or if it does come from somewhere, that this CO₂ has no physical or chemical properties. This is seriously unrealistic, and not really sceptical either.

In 1972 there was an obvious need to stop using finite energy resources, in 1992 the need to stop using finite energy resources was once again obvious, in 2010 the need to stop using finite energy resources was even more obvious, but what did the average Dutch person do? Three times nothing.

Because of i-freedom, scarcity isn’t taken seriously. If it had been decided in 1972 to keep the CO₂ concentration at the same level that it was at that time, our current CO₂ level would be fifteen percent lower.²¹ I repeat, fifteen percent.

In barely 38 years, the remains of woodlands and plants—that’s what fossil fuels are—from tens or maybe hundreds of millions of years have been squandered. The comparison with obesity is rather lame, as this seems to be the most voracious, greedy pig-out that you could possibly imagine.

And the patient still doesn’t seem to be on the mend.

More and more cars are being produced. Also, they are on average getting heavier and heavier—that correlates quite well, incidentally, with the average girth of their passengers.

There are more and more flights too—because the neighbours went there, people want to visit Australia and the beaches of Thailand.

Even with trains you see an addiction to oil. Ordinary trains have become a bit more economical over the years, but high-speed trains have been added to the mix. What is more, they are introduced into the market in such a way that they replace other trains. You can still travel from Utrecht to Paris without a high-speed train, but you must change trains twice as often and the train takes a roundabout route. Ecological footprint?

In the era of climate change, you might expect innovations to include a low-speed train rather than a high-speed train. Say, with a maximum speed of eighty kilometres per hour, the option to help by pedalling, weight-saving construction, the roof full of solar panels. Eighty kilometres per hour is the top speed of many fast mammals, twice as fast as the fastest human males. Why would you want to go faster?

Outside of the transport sector you also come across oil addiction. Near Utrecht there was a plan to build a tower 262 metres high, the *Belle van Zuylen*. That is the Dutch name of Isabelle de Charrière—naming a macho project after a woman! It seems that the design was aimed at maximising energy usage, both when building it and once it is used. No one would use the staircases there, you could work that out quite easily. Luckily construction did not go ahead, but it did in the case of several similar projects.

The question concerning this way of causing scarcity, addiction to oil, is how it leads to misery elsewhere.

37 WHAT IS OFFERED BY THE MARKET

I will now look at the free market. I said earlier that market economy, money economy and capitalist economy are not synonyms. Market and money economy are therefore not the same things. In

its simplest form, the market is no more than the place where people seeking something and people offering something meet each other. If supply and demand come together, then an exchange can take place in various different ways.

'I would quite like that.'

'Here, take it, and let me know how you get on with it.'

This will not happen very often, because it amounts to asking for and receiving a gift. In theory there is nothing wrong with this, a gift economy could well lead to the maximum number of happy people.

'Shall we swap what you have to offer with what I have?'

That is more like what we are used to, and even more so if one or other neutral means of exchange exists. A means of exchange such as this is called money, and then it becomes both a market economy and a money economy.

Where can you go with your demand? Nowhere, actually. My illustration above was of a more ideal market than the existing one, because the market is generally based primarily on supply, where suppliers hope that there is a demand for what they supply or that they can create a demand for it. But where is the giant suggestions box for people to post their demands in the hope that someone picks them up and offers a suitable product or service?

A large obstacle to this is that the market we know is organised in a capitalist manner. This means that it is not about supplying useful things but supplying things that can generate capital, which means supplying things in large, larger and still larger quantities. The market then ceases to be the place where supply and demand come together, but instead becomes the place where things are supplied in large quantities. This type of market is not at all interested in seeking out the demand first.

There is a demand for a low-speed train (from me, for instance), but a demand does not automatically lead to supply. This does happen in the case of something like a recumbent bicycle, but that is a niche market where the route from a customer's demand to a manufacturer is short. The manufacturers are very keen on experimenting, so

a special demand can soon lead to a special product. I can't see that happening quickly in the case of trains.

My grandmother used to make made-to-measure clothes and set her asking price so that she had enough to live on. Economic growth didn't interest her at all, and I think that this attitude still exists. Many businesses simply supply something that is needed and leave it at that: potatoes, winter coats, books, etcetera. It is a market, but one without capitalist motives.

If you believe the ideologists, the free market is just about the best thing that humanity has ever thought of. This freedom is perhaps attractive as long as it is not just about i-freedom, but in the meantime I am wondering what would be so terrible about a non-market economy. The market as a place where supply and demand meet each other is simply an activity of society. Society can also develop other activities; a society could for example discuss en masse what the society really needs: drinking water, potatoes, public transport, etcetera. Some members of society could then ensure that these demands are met, and someone who drives a train gets potatoes in return. That is not a market, nor is it a dictatorially organised five-year plan, but what we want to happen does happen.

38 COMPETITION

Liberalisation is a wonderful thing, because it gives rise to competition, and competition ensures that what is on offer in the marketplace gets better and better, as inferior offers lose out to competition.

Possibly, in some cases.

In The Hague, there are two main train stations a kilometre apart called 'Hollands Spoor' and 'Den Haag Centraal', and you can go by train from one to the other. This has, however, only been possible since 1976. Earlier, Central was called 'Staatsspoor', because there were once two different train companies each with their own station in The Hague, the 'Maatschappij tot Exploitatie van Staatsspoorwegen' (Company for the Exploitation of the State

Railways) and the ‘Hollandsche IJzeren Spoorweg-Maatschappij’ (Holland’s Iron Railway Company). By removing competition, this awkwardness in The Hague has luckily been improved somewhat.

For bus routes around Utrecht, however, the opposite has happened: awkwardness has been increased because of competition. Several bus companies run services; this came about because of ‘putting out to tender’ or whatever that fuss is called—some process or other that is supposed to improve competition. If you’re on the bus from X and you ask if it connects to the bus to Y at the bus station, the bus driver may well answer, ‘I’ve no idea, it’s another bus company’.

There are an awful lot of examples like this. Instead of discussing which video system has the best picture quality, it is left to the market to determine. The best successor of the DVD? Let the market decide. Discussing how all computers could communicate with each other while remaining secure? Are you silly, market individualism is better. Or SLR cameras compatible with lenses from all manufacturers? How can you be so crazy as to want such freedom of choice?

Not that freedom of choice is necessarily wonderful. Health insurance companies should compete more with each other, it was said. People should have more choice, it was said. This will give rise to a varied selection of policies, it was thought. Everyone, after all, enjoys finding the health insurer that is most suited to them, it was supposed. As a result, millions of hours of working time were lost while people investigated the details of what all the insurers offered, then discussing with colleagues which insurer they chose, etcetera. I did the same thing at home. One has a package for sportspeople but didn’t realise that some sportspeople are no longer young. Another has a package for people over 55 but forgot that some of them play a lot of sports, and that some older people don’t want to subsidise others who decide they need cosmetic surgery on their eyelids. The cover for physiotherapy may be excellent but not for dentistry, or alternatively the cover for dentistry is excellent but the arrangements for physiotherapy aren’t.

I’m not inventing these examples, they are all genuine. Competition clearly wasn’t able to remedy these imperfections.

Or take the banks.

It was once the case that you did the banks a favour by allowing them temporarily to look after money that you had kept hidden away in old socks. The bank repaid the favour by paying you some interest. Now it’s the other way around, banks behave as if they are doing you a favour by allowing you to keep your money there, and so the bank charges for everything they do for you. This of course is to keep their shareholders, large depositors and similar people in a good mood, as they want as much return as possible and if they can get some of this from ordinary, everyday customers, then that is what a bank has to do.

Banks compete with one another in the hope of obtaining more customers, so they outbid each other with special offers which they hold out to potential customers. If they offer 4.1% then we’ll offer 4.2%. To achieve that extra return they have to gamble a bit more on the stock market.

Providing a return is the core business of banks, and therefore so is gambling. Because of this, something like the credit crisis of 2008 is a possibly rare but nonetheless normal consequence of competition. Supporting the capitalist ideology involves taking a gamble from time to time.

39 THE INVISIBLE HAND

Behind pleas for competition and the free market there lie the thoughts expressed by Adam Smith (1723-1790), that if everyone strives for what is best for themselves, then the results will be the best for society. The people who strive for the best for themselves constitute an invisible hand turning the control knobs of society.

Although this is a famous saying, it is only discussed once in each of his major books. In ‘The Theory of Moral Sentiments’ the invisible hand appears on page 165 of 314, and in his main work ‘An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations’, on page 349 of 744, where he writes: ‘he intends only his own gain, and he is in this [...] led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was not part of his

intention. [...] By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it.'

Some people will always believe in fairy stories.

Note that the statement in the text is qualified with the word 'frequently', so perhaps Smith didn't mean any harm with it, but nowadays something like the credit crisis is the simple yet global consequence of the pursuit of self-interest by a number of American homeowners and the pursuit of self-interest by a number of American banks. They had no intention at all of serving the interest of society and so were very effective at performing a disservice to the world at large.

The end result was yet more deaths from hunger.

Now I will return to the four considerations from chapter 25. For the first consideration, whether or not to cause misery, when someone decides to serve their own self-interest by killing the biggest nuisance-maker in the city, they may well unintentionally serve the interests of society by doing this. Nevertheless, society does not approve of this sort of behaviour, and of course neither do I.

The second consideration concerns the invisible hand. People ignore the consequences of their actions for faraway countries because it is impressed on them that they must work hard to build up the prevailing economic edifice, because that is good for the country and therefore good for everyone.

The third consideration, whether or not to cause scarcity, also contains the invisible hand. When there are ten people present at a birthday party and the cake is cut into eight pieces, then it is immediately obvious that the hand that cuts the cake causes scarcity and that this could well lead to unpleasantness at the party. Mostly, however, the consequences of causing scarcity are not visible, they lie beyond the horizon. Through keeping alive the belief in Smith's invisible hand, people get the impression that they don't have to think through the possible consequences of their actions.

Only when you get to the fourth consideration, how to divide up scarcity, do people try to see for themselves what the consequences of their actions are. For Smith it seems as though you must either

pursue your self-interest or put collective interest first, but for me there is something between these two options. As I often said earlier, I am very much in favour of individualism, i.e. very much in favour of doing what you want, but I am also in favour of considering what happens when individuals' actions are added together.

I can see that the invisible hand idea lies behind this too. You could decide to cause scarcity based on the third consideration, but then immediately apply the fourth consideration and wonder whether the scarcity can be divided up. Or whether your behaviour can be added up on the societal level, which amounts to the same thing. What you then do is to say to yourself that you will not be the only one who wants to behave in this way, and all those who choose this behaviour inevitably have an effect together on society and the world. Together this forms a great invisible hand that governs the world.

So, for example, you can have the ambition to become a millionaire, but not everyone can become a millionaire, that is impossible (except via the route of mega-inflation, where everyone can become a billionaire without being any better off). Those who want to be millionaires together ensure, as if with an invisible hand, that there is not as much left over for everyone else. This is like the birthday cake that is cut into too few pieces so that some people don't get any cake.

With ecological issues, something similar happens: when the sum total of your behaviour requires there to be more than one planet Earth, that means that you are causing scarcity elsewhere. There are many behaviours that appear to have a negligible effect on a worldwide scale, but if others behave in a similar way then together with these others you form an invisible hand—a huge one. You don't notice if a small amount of soap ends up in a watercourse. But in the 1960s virtually everyone did that, and the watercourses became dead as doornails. In places where there were rapids or mini-waterfalls, masses of foam formed that were several metres thick in some cases. That didn't appear very civilised.

40 ADDITIVE FREEDOMS

Every society devises ways of dealing with saboteurs. ‘Society’ here includes territorial organisations such as a municipality, a province, a country or Europe, but also simpler organisations such as voluntary organisations or sports clubs. These last two have constitutions or rulebooks containing paragraphs to deal with sabotage, arguments, financial fraud and suchlike. Territorial organisations have lawbooks, legal codes or whatever they are called.

‘And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus...’²²

And it came to pass in later days that a decree went out from Brussels defining exactly what may and may not be called ‘jam’.

‘Jam’ may used to describe what happens when too many cars try to use the same road, but its normal meaning is a sweet fruity spread. It contains a lot of sugar, which is very good for maintaining the bacteria that cause tooth decay, which in turn is good for maintaining dentists. So, when crafty people from the anti-tooth-decay movement realised that you could sweeten the fruity spread just with sugars from fruit, our country was too small. The EU decreed precisely what may and may not be called jam. Freedom of speech does not extend to allowing producers of sweet fruity spreads to call something ‘sugar-free jam’ if they see fit.

Such a directive cannot work without punishments. There must be official bodies to supervise the correct application of the directive, committees to extend and develop the directive, discussions between European countries to harmonise all former laws pertaining to jam, which in turn need translators. All of this keeps hordes of civil servants in work. I would think, though, that governments could find something better to do than this.

Making freedom the foundation of society, for example, and from this perspective examining whether the composition of what we spread on our bread is a task of the government or not.

Dealing with the saboteurs that I mentioned at the start of this

chapter is certainly a task that needs doing. Imagine that a society has freedom as its foundation. It is built not on egoistical i-freedoms, but by its nature on s-freedoms. Imagine also that there are people who do not understand the concept of s-freedom very well, who want to exercise a load of extra i-freedoms. Imagine, then, that the vast majority of people in the society want to do something to deal with those who want to sabotage the freedoms forming the foundation of that society. A group of people from society takes up this task and invents rules, etcetera, or in more common parlance they develop laws and specify punishments. These laws and punishments govern sabotage of the foundations of a society based on freedom. A law on jam doesn’t fit into this category.

A state such as this is much smaller than modern-day states, and everyone who would like a smaller state ought to concentrate their efforts on the societal level, i.e. with which freedoms are additive and which are not. You can make freedom the foundation of your own life by realising that freedoms involving greed, laziness and probably addiction to oil are not additive, and that you therefore don’t want to have i-freedoms like these.

41 SABOTAGE FROM ON HIGH

The above discussion concerned sabotage from below. But sometimes, in the case of dictators and absolute monarchs, the biggest saboteur of attempts to found a society based on freedom is also the biggest boss. In these cases the action against sabotage has to come from the grassroots. This action always occurs in the end, although it may take a long time, as was the case with the fall of the Iron Curtain. How long it would have taken with Nazi Germany is impossible to say; the regime was fought intensely by force of arms and the war was portrayed as ‘good’, perhaps to give some reassurance to the families of the vast number of victims. Would it have been possible without war? That is not unthinkable. It would certainly have been possible without such horrors as the bombardment of Dresden.

In chapter 17, I gave a brief history of democracy. Democracy was preceded by sabotage from on high of the kind that I have just described, but at the tentative end point of this history—modern democracy—it remains the case that those in power appear more like dictators or absolute monarchs than is good for society.

A dictator provides extremely well for himself, and by so doing sabotages the freedom of many other people. The story of the planet of a thousand people shows how ‘providing extremely well for yourself’ and ‘sabotaging the freedom of others’ are inextricably linked in the case of non-additive freedoms. The freedom of the two rich people on that planet prevented others from exercising the same freedom. Adherents of Adam Smith, if they can be called that, prevent a society being founded on freedom by sabotaging attempts to do so. Indeed, they do so with approval from on high, which is the crazy thing.

In the previous chapter, I mentioned a state founded on freedom, s-freedom of course, and how such a state would only need to take measures against sabotage. Such a state must specifically avoid shielding saboteurs. Even in cases where there is no dictator or absolute monarch in charge, today’s states put the interests of a small minority ahead of the interests of the majority. The state more or less lets itself be the lap-dog of those who are already providing extremely well for themselves, but this is something that the state really should avoid, I think.

The same is true for political parties, by the way. It seems a nice idea that parliamentary elections could reflect the popular opinions of the population, but such a reflection is actually not that fruitful. All that is necessary is that a number of people consider the situation regarding freedom—more precisely, s-freedom.

That is not what you see at the moment. When there is a threat that something may have to change for farmers, the Christian parties jump up; when something threatens to make capital growth harder, the liberals raise their voices, etcetera. There is intense squabbling, each group representing part of society gets on the barricades once there is a threat that certain i-freedoms might be eroded, even if this erosion makes sense in terms of s-freedom. Compromises arise

from the squabbling, it is true, but the overall effect is of a continual struggle to maintain certain i-freedoms, which in turn means that the parties sabotage the notion of a society based on freedom, s-freedom. From on high.

How is that possible? The story could be told somewhat facetiously as follows. In the last Dutch parliamentary elections, the turnout was 80 percent. The non-voters forgot to vote, or were ill, indifferent or unsatisfied, but in any case gave no mandate to others to make decisions, so 30 of the 150 seats in parliament should have remained empty. Then there were people who voted for small parties which failed to meet the electoral threshold, so they too have not given anyone a mandate. This is equivalent to two seats. Also there are people who voted for particular parties because of specific policies or standpoints which those parties got rid of after the election, so in fact these people too have not given the parties their mandate. Then there are the floating voters, who float from one party to another because their opinion does not match that of any party. They do vote, but are they really giving a party their mandate? Then there is the issue that parliamentarians earn plenty of money, not as much as captains of industry, but more than the great majority of the people they represent, so they cannot really empathise well with the interests of unemployed people and squatters (to say nothing of the interests of butterflies). And so it can happen that a proposal is passed by half of the votes while reflecting the opinions of only ten percent of the people.

Oddly enough, this tends to be the ten percent who were already well-off.

Parliament and the government pee their pants once this ten percent threaten to withdraw their capital, move their business abroad or leave the country. The last of these wouldn’t be a bad idea in terms of s-freedom, but is rather tough on the foreign countries who have to put up with these capitalist flying Dutchmen (or women, but mostly men).

42 POSITIVE IN THREE WAYS

Recently I attended a symposium about climate issues and someone was present from one or other government ministry. It was of course about what people need to do differently to save the climate, but the man from the ministry jumped up and said, ‘You must ensure that you always tell positive stories’.

In other words, not as I did in the previous chapter.

There is the positive story that technological solutions are extremely important for combatting dangerous CO₂ emissions. This positive story sounded so positive that some people bought cars which had more efficient engines but were so much bigger and heavier than their previous cars that the net effect for CO₂ emissions was the opposite of what they intended. This positive story cannot boast of great success, that is the pitfall of the government’s good news approach.

But there I am being negative again.

For those who haven’t yet realised, this book contains an extremely positive story, investigating how for the first time in world history (if you don’t count small nomadic societies) a society could be founded based on freedom.

That would be very positive by itself, but there are also all sorts of positive side-effects. I have mentioned that the state could become much smaller, indeed, smaller than the size of state promoted by those who feel that their greed is under attack and blame the state for this.

I also mentioned, in chapters 24 and 25, that societal issues do not need to be dealt with by threats of punishment, but that people can decide a lot of things for themselves. I will return to the positive effects of this point later.

Proposing something positive is a positive act, I accept, but ‘positive’ is a word that is worth pausing to consider. There are three interpretations of ‘positive’ which are worth looking at.

The first interpretation of ‘positive’ is ‘not negative’. It would of

course be much better for the climate if people didn’t use cars, or if they do buy a car, it is small and very economical, and if they drive that they drive as slowly as possible. But politicians, who form one category of storytellers, prefer not to tell stories like this. Politicians want to be popular, otherwise they will not be re-elected, so they leave negative stories alone, as people can take them as a reprimand. As a result, the voters, who are not all equally clever and sensible, think that it cannot be that bad after all, and technological solutions will be found (a story that politicians do like to tell), and they step on the accelerator. Their cars, in turn, are advertised with slogans where all negative aspects are left out, because salespeople want to be popular, or no one will buy their products.

For the second interpretation of ‘positive’, you emphasise that something is fun, entertaining, a challenge, or something similar. After a few decades of reports of climate disruptions, even politicians think that something must be done about it, but in a light-hearted or funny way. Groningen city council, for example, launched a plan to improve the sustainability of the city.²³ And very nice it was too. They made it into a type of competition of one street against another and, on top of that, of one city against another by claiming Groningen will become the ‘most sustainable city’. Groningen versus Rotterdam or The Hague?

But at the same time, the texts for initiatives such as this form nice examples of omitting negative aspects. You won’t find ‘townsfolk, don’t use cars’ or ‘use a light bulb of a maximum of 20 watts per person’. It does say ‘The goal is a clean, livable city and an energy-neutral city in 2025’, but it doesn’t say that until 2025 it will be an unclean, not-so-livable and non-climate-neutral city, i.e. that it will take 16 years to reach this goal. Yet in practice it could be achieved tomorrow, or in any case within a year. And it could just as well have been achieved 16 years ago.

Not just in Groningen, but also in Utrecht and Amsterdam and many smaller places.

In the third interpretation of ‘positive’, it stands for something like ‘pleasant’, ‘nice’ or ‘good’. It is not so difficult to include a pleasant attribute in a collection of ideas and then say that a lot of problems

will be solved if everyone, or nearly everyone, followed that body of ideas. Helpfulness, peacefulness, a self-sacrificing nature, gentleness, modesty, neighbourliness, charity, honesty, empathy, to name a few attributes. But the more pleasant an attribute, the less likely it is that the majority will follow the body of ideas containing it. However, I would like to be proved wrong in this.

You can compel people to accept a body of ideas. Religions in particular have tried this, and so have communists. It doesn't work, for the simple reason that compulsion is at odds with freedom. People become obstinate if they are denied freedom.

43 MORAL FOUNDATIONS

The word 'good' takes us into the field of ethics. People have various ideas about justice, the proper way to act, what counts as good or honest and what doesn't. Ethics and meta-ethics involve the study of this. When I studied some academic books on ethics, the first thing that struck me was that there are a large number of different schools of thought in ethics.²⁴ The second thing was that not one of these seemed totally right to me. That is not something that you would expect in a subject that so many people have been thinking about for centuries.

Animals, such as humans, that generally go around in social groups have certain inherent behaviours which ensure that their societies run effectively. Species closely related to humans, such as bonobos and chimpanzees, also exhibit such behaviours, and you could say that a raw form of morality is built into us.²⁵ In our case, it is clearly in such a raw, uncocrystallised, ambiguous form that moral philosophy can generate many different theories and meta-theories from it. From the multiplicity of theories, I believe it follows immediately that it is not sensible to develop a moral foundation for a society of a substantial size, because a lot of people are likely to disagree with the choice of moral foundation (even for a society as small as a family, it doesn't always work, and for organisations such as churches that are established on a pure moral basis, history gives us plenty

of examples of arguments and schisms, so it doesn't work properly even for them).

In order to avoid having to design a moral foundation, I began my story with a totally amoral interpretation of the concept of freedom. Then I looked at how freedom could be taken as the foundation for a society, and not entirely unexpectedly, my investigation kept revolving around the question of the extent to which individuals take account of society when making their choices.

And my investigation continues to revolve around this question. With the help of ideas about what is appropriate or good, people choose how to behave and act. Naturally they have the freedom to follow an existing ethical theory while they do this, or make up their own version—but some take the liberty not to give a damn about what they do. This is the individual level. On this level, grand moral ideas can be taken as the guiding principles, since an individual soon agrees with himself or herself, but on the societal level, grand ideas such as these do not by necessity form the guiding principles. 'Something' must be done to develop principles by which to organise society, because there are people who really don't have any grand ideas, who don't give a damn, who sabotage society. You might say that this 'something' must always be a moral foundation, but as I have described it, it is mathematical rather than moral, concerning whether behaviour is additive on a societal level.

If a society is the addition of all individual behaviours, then a problem in society indicates a problem in the addition. There is clearly something non-additive in the mix, behaviour that was chosen without taking sufficient account of its effect on society. 'Sufficient', that is, seen from the societal level, not from the level of the individual and his or her greed, egoism or egocentrism, which that individual was fine about.

44 THE WHOLE

The chip-eater who shoved someone off a park bench in order to sit there himself was thinking only of himself. On the planet of a thou-

sand people, on the other hand, the thousand people had divided up everything precisely—work, income, possessions—but there were also two people who didn't take part in this. Adam Smith gives the impression that everything will work out right of its own accord if people pursue self-interest, but on the planet of a thousand people, that appeared not to work. With something like the climate situation, you can even see that it seems more likely that it will go wrong of its own accord. There are lots of small actions carried out from individual self-interest (going to the shops by car, leaving the computer on when you are not using it), which nevertheless add up to a continually rising CO₂ level and a rising sea level. Something could be done about this, but in a rich country such as the Netherlands, for measures to protect the climate the percentage of saboteurs approaches 100 percent. The ruling ideas are the ideas of the wasteful class. No politician wants to get burnt by this issue, by daring to tackle individual interests, out of fear of becoming unpopular.

Earlier, I mentioned individualism and collectives. The opposite of individualism is collectivism, where the whole is considered more important than the individuals, leading to things like lack of freedom of expression, forcing people into line, rigid discipline and so forth. If people want to become part of collectives, that is up to them, but it's not to my taste.

It is not good—not to my taste, at least—when the collective is prioritised above the individual, but it is also not good when the individual is prioritised above the climate. On satellite photographs you can see that the extent of the North Pole ice decreases each year, but if the polar ice becomes water this only results in a limited rise in sea level. The glaciers on Greenland, however, contain enough water for a rise in sea level of 7.2 metres, and the ice on Antarctica for a rise of some 61.1 metres.²⁶ It is a sort of Russian roulette to take the gamble that the ice will always remain where it is. In the distant past there were periods without glaciers such as these, and if that suddenly happened again (via one or other unpleasant but as yet undiscovered feedback mechanism) all that would be left of the Netherlands would be a small piece of coastline near Maastricht plus a handful of small islands in the east of the country. The west

part, where most people now live, would disappear under the waves. If the glaciers melt much more slowly (the IPCC suggests 0.18 to 0.59 metres per century²⁷) then in the long term it would still become impossible to build dikes to hold the water back. Sometime soon, individuals will need to take drastic measures to deal with climate change. Or the number of individuals would need to decrease drastically—that is also a possibility.

What this revolves around is the relationship of the individual to the whole.

Adam Smith could simply ignore the worldwide scale: environmental problems did not exist then, or science was too primitive to consider them at all, or they seemed so small that the Earth could deal with them. Social problems were either local and only affected people who were considered too unimportant to take into account, or they were a long way away in the colonies and no one bothered about a bunch of dead people over there, since they were just slaves or coolies.

Nowadays there are a few effects for which the worldwide scale can no longer be ignored. That is, they should no longer be ignored, but loads of people still ignore them, and prefer to believe Adam Smith's notions.

There are economic effects that I have mentioned several times already. People consider it quite normal for money to travel all over the world to find places where the financial returns are highest, but the worldwide consequences of this—hundreds of millions of deaths—are ignored.

There are also ecological effects on a worldwide scale, and climatic disruption is one of them. Small actions by individuals add up to great consequences. We only have one atmosphere, which pays no attention to national borders and cannot be divided up into portions. Every molecule of greenhouse gas emitted here can travel everywhere.

Another effect is non-biodegradable waste. There are people who drop litter on the ground even when they are two metres from a rubbish bin, and on the beach you can find all sorts of rubbish which has drifted in from the sea. This can be cleaned up, but in the mid-

dle of the sea there are areas where floating rubbish collects because of the directions of the currents. There is the *Great Pacific Garbage Patch*, a region with the area of Germany, France and the Benelux combined, where all the floating rubbish in the northern half of the Pacific Ocean eventually ends up.²⁸ It contains millions of tons of rubbish.

The plastic ends up, amongst other places, in the stomachs of all sorts of animals. The stomachs of some species of dead birds often contain quite a bit of plastic. These species have not evolved to deal with a world where a rubbish-spreader such as humans exists. You could of course also say that humans themselves have not evolved to deal with modern life.

45 SOCIAL ASPECTS WITHIN A GROUP

Frans de Waal researches the behaviour of apes, in particular our close relatives chimpanzees and bonobos. In each successive book by him appear new and interesting parallels between humans and (other) apes. Co-operation, reconciliation, a feeling of justice, altruism, empathy, all sorts of behaviour that could form fragments of a moral framework can be seen in our close relatives.²⁸ Some of them even do better than humans, such as the bonobos who have a brilliant way of keeping violence within the species under control—brilliant, that is, from a feminist viewpoint, although not perhaps from a prudish one.

It is of course logical that a social ape would be evolutionarily endowed with a number of behaviours that are useful for social life. There is however a catch. Chimps and bonobos live in groups of a few tens of individuals. Chimps, the males in particular, see no problem in massacring other groups, as Jane Goodall observed in the wild. There may be social skills, but they sometimes only have a limited range.

Prehistoric humans also would have gone around in fairly small groups, but later on, with the development of farming and cities, that all changed. Nowadays you may well know a few thousand

people and may well have dealings with a lot more people, even if only because you walk and cycle along the same streets as them. Or driving in cars—which still exist. How I could forget them, more than 125,000 come past my house each day.

When individuals look no further than their own group, you could call this the ‘ape level’, but that is unkind to apes. Apes only rarely deal violently with other groups, and there are also plenty of known examples where apes have shown empathic behaviour to those outside their group and even to other species. (These were mostly observed in zoos—but is it empathic to keep apes in zoos?) The large brains of *Homo sapiens* have made it possible to look much, much further than one’s own group—this could be called the sapiens level.

Unfortunately there are many examples of human behaviour where the sapiens level is not used when choosing how to behave. Social within the group, not social outside the group. Group in these examples include nuclear families, extended families, neighbourhoods, clubs, countries, regions, parts of the world, social classes, political parties, churches, religions, peoples, races, etcetera. Many vendettas and wars have been fought because one group can’t stand another group. Social? No. Sapiens? No.

Read article 1 of the Dutch constitution: *All persons in the Netherlands shall be treated equally in equal circumstances. Discrimination on the grounds of religion, belief, political opinion, race or sex or on any other grounds whatsoever shall not be permitted.*²⁹

Beautiful.

Read also article 2.1: *Dutch nationality shall be regulated by Act of Parliament.* Plus article 2.2: *The admission and expulsion of aliens shall be regulated by Act of Parliament.*

This is a very sneaky combination of articles, because article 2 states that you can be Dutch or an alien, and while people from both groups may be in the Netherlands, they are not treated equally, nor is there protection against discrimination. Aliens are discriminated against on the grounds of their place of birth, and because there is a quite strong correlation between place of birth and ‘race’, there is only a narrow difference between article 2 and racism. Sapiens?

Quite apart from the constitution, democracy is also not doing well here. I would have thought that a government would rule a particular territory, including everything in it. But during my lifetime, the population of butterflies has been decimated, as I mentioned earlier, and even very common species of butterfly keep declining in numbers. I think that the butterfly index is a better indicator of the situation of a country than GNP or similar indices. The idea of ‘governing’ creatures such as butterflies is not really on the agenda, because when push comes to shove, the parties that form the government follow the interests of their own associates and their own voters. Not the butterfly level, and not the sapiens level.

46 SOCIAL INSTINCTS

Earlier, I wrote that humans are neither good nor bad by nature. It is simply the case that both possibilities exist within humans because humans are born with instincts of self-preservation plus social instincts for preservation of social groups. On top of these instincts can be built large or small intellectual constructions, of which all ethical theories are examples. Substantial brains are needed for this, but fortunately humans are born with these too.

When someone exercises her/his instinct for self-preservation to the maximum, this leads to a maximum of individualism, consisting mostly of many i-freedoms. But in the case of such an individual, the social instinct remains entirely unused, so you could say that, despite all the individualism, such a person is not a fully developed individual.

A society of such individuals produces the war of all against all which Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) talked about.³⁰

As for the other extreme, a society in which people develop their social instincts to the maximum, what would that look like? Perhaps you would find it in nomadic groups of gatherer-hunters where the size of group fits in with our evolutionary heritage and where the individuals cannot survive without the group?

In small nomadic groups, everyone knows everyone else, and the

consequences of your choices are immediately visible to everyone. In modern-day society, however, the group has become so large that the consequences of your choices can be felt far beyond the horizon. For issues such as the climate, ‘the group’ can even be ‘the whole world’. There is only one atmosphere, and everything that lives in the atmosphere together forms one group. That much is inescapable.

In chapter 25 I presented four considerations concerning freedom. The considerations were: causing misery, causing misery far away, causing scarcity, dividing up scarcity. Or not, as the case may be. For each consideration in the series, thinking about the societal level was more important than in the previous consideration, i.e. social instincts were used more. This may involve more effort to think things through, but as I already noted, it is lucky that humans are born with large brains.

There is a positive story behind this. If the considerations are followed one after the other, at each step the number of freedoms belonging to the spectrum of greed decreases but there is an increase in social cohesion, friendliness and other pleasant aspects that characterise the social instinct. Some people might consider this negative, but I am of a sufficiently optimistic nature that I suspect that many people would rather like it.

47 UNCIVILISED

Someone who concludes from the first consideration that it is fine to cause misery would be considered brutal by many people. Their deeds could range from pickpocketing to fraud, or from fighting to murdering. It is not worth wasting any more words discussing this. The second consideration includes causing misery in faraway countries.

Causing child labour via the price mechanism.

Causing floods via the greenhouse effect.

Causing deaths from hunger via flows of money.

And so forth.

These involve processes which take place on a worldwide scale, where individuals think that their contribution makes little difference or is negligible. The processes also have names that sound detached, where individuals seem to be absent: mechanism, effect, flows of money. George Orwell (1903-1950) would probably call this Newspeak, after the truth-concealing language that was spoken in his dystopian novel '1984'.

These processes involve a lot of thought behind the scenes, a lot of brainwork, but this brainwork is barely, if at all, directed at the consequences of the processes. A lot of brainwork is used to search for financial returns in the furthest corners of the world while forgetting that child labour could have been abolished from the world long ago—but well, the citizenry takes great pleasure in snapping up bargains. Also, electrical goods that use up electricity even when they are switched off are still produced—but hey, inventing such items doesn't result in a one-way ticket to Siberia.

Near the beginning of this book I gave a definition of 'civilised': that the societal level is used as the guideline when deciding what you do or don't do. When processes are involved which have worldwide effects, then only one societal level is important: not your home, street, neighbourhood, city or country, but the whole world. Yet that is precisely the level which many people prefer to forget when it comes to economic and ecological issues. This falls amply within my definition of 'uncivilised'.

When it comes to economic issues, it is remarkable that there is even one political party that embraces capitalism. Christian parties should be against it because capitalism is at odds with charity, Socialists because it turns out antisocial, Greens because it goes together with many environmental problems, Liberals because capitalism frustrates the foundation of a society based on freedom, and populists of all kinds because the financial returns don't reach ordinary people, as shown by the story of the planet of a thousand people.

For ecological issues, it is noteworthy that people let their direct self-interests prevail over the well-understood self-interest of maintaining the planet. Destroying a window pane is prohibited but

destroying the planet isn't. There will be a big price to pay in the end for failing to deal with ecological issues, but until that time people wait for the others to do something. Imagine going by bicycle while the neighbours profit from the convenience of their car, i.e. from freedoms which belong to the spectrums of laziness, greed or oil addiction, but mostly to all three together.

Because practically all politicians embrace capitalism economically and are prepared to put up with all kind of ecological problems, the long-term forecast is: persistent uncivilised behaviour.

Sigh.

All the same, people are sometimes very civilised. People who wait on the platform to get onto the train that has just arrived often crowd impatiently around the doors, but lots of people can be very patient at waiting for others to do things like saving energy. In other words, people wait in a very civilised way in order to become civilised.

48 CIVILISED?

For the third consideration, whether or not to cause scarcity, I gave the example of a party where a cake is cut into too few pieces. In this way, scarcity is created.

There is a way to ensure that this creation of scarcity does not lead to misery in a faraway country (second consideration), by first causing misery but then quickly thinking up something to correct it. This is like cutting the cake into too few pieces but then bringing out a few slices of stale bread so that the unlucky people don't go hungry.

Here are a few examples from real life. Social security is introduced for those who have no work—with the implied admission that society contains antisocial processes. New nature reserves are designed—with the implied admission of previous maltreatment of the surrounding area. A minimum wage is introduced—which in a globalised economy should really be a worldwide minimum wage, but this is a very long way off. Foreign aid is provided to developing countries—which indicates that exploitation must have happened

previously using flows of money. Microcredit is acclaimed—which means that there must be an enormous imbalance in growth, otherwise no one would have thought of microcredit. A noise barrier is built between a housing estate and a motorway—which...

There are plenty more examples.

Democrats of all political flavours keep thinking up corrective measures to prevent part of the misery from occurring. Subsidies, economic incentives, social security, etcetera—but all these attempts to construct capitalism with a human face, as it might be called, contain an implied admission that the real face of capitalism is inhuman.

In this context, ‘human’ is a strange concept. Those who carry out inhuman acts are themselves humans. Clearly there is a distinction between human actions that are human and those that are not. The concept ‘inhumane’ includes the same confusion and lack of clarity. ‘Human’ of course concerns the societal level and how people include it in their decisions, i.e. what I have expressed as two different concepts of freedom (i-freedom and s-freedom) and in the concepts uncivilised and civilised. To me this is clearer than the ‘human face’ that capitalism by itself apparently lacks.

The corrective measures are attempts to drill in a bit of social thinking into capitalist society. It is better than nothing, but is it enough? Is it civilised? Because it always involves dealing with the symptoms and making a big detour to avoid tackling the causes, I don’t think much of the level of civilisation of these measures. Intentionally dividing a cake into too few pieces and expecting someone else to correct the ensuing misery is bit like living unhealthily and hoping that medicines and treatments exist if things go wrong. It also produces an unnecessarily complicated society, I think. When a correction is invented for every undesired effect, this soon leads to a proliferation of regulations.

You could call it weakly civilised, all these attempts to allow scarcity to occur and then try to sweep away the resulting misery. It is certainly not very civilised in any case, because many people’s freedoms are only grudgingly accepted if at all.

49 CIVILISED!

In chapter 15, I wrote that there are two ways of founding a society based on freedom: a weak version and a strong version. The weak version is the one I have just described, with an uncivilised aspect (dividing the cake unequally) and a civilised aspect (counteracting the shortage of cake with crusts of stale bread). This weakly civilised approach is the result of the choice made for the third consideration, choosing to give rise to scarcity, plus not proceeding to the fourth consideration.

The fourth consideration concerns whether or not to divide up scarcity. I used two very simple examples to illustrate scarcity, the park bench and the birthday cake. In the park, behaviours ranged from rude, via weakly civilised (wanting to remain seated at all costs once you have a place) to very civilised (‘feel free to take my place’). In the example of the cake, I only mentioned the weakly civilised behaviour; the really civilised behaviour is of course to divide the cake into enough pieces of equal size. That is the recipe for the best birthday party, I would think.

Such a party is well-organised, but the Earth isn’t. On the scale of park benches and cakes at parties, many people choose the civilised option without any problem, but on a larger scale things are different. What is the problem here? Could it be the difficulty of counting to large numbers, as I suggested earlier? Perhaps people can be social/civilised in a small society of ten, thirty or a hundred people, but not on a larger scale. At what point does it go wrong—somewhere around a thousand or ten thousand people? At that point, there are too many people to know all of them well, and it seems OK to behave more rudely to people you don’t know?

Or is it the infinite confidence in the invisible hand of Adam Smith?

The dogma of the invisible hand probably doesn’t do justice to Adam Smith, by the way. In his book ‘Wealth of Nations’, words such as sympathy and fellow-feeling do not appear, but an earlier work of his

is full of them.³¹ Also, he wrote all of this two and a half centuries ago. Could Smith count to a million or a billion back then? Am I perhaps asking too much of the intellectual capacity of *Homo sapiens* with my plea for looking at the additivity of behaviours? I think that the situation is better than might be expected, as it just involves broadening your horizon a bit. It is well-known that there are substantial emissions of greenhouse gases, so it's pretty obvious that using less electricity constitutes more additive behaviour than using more electricity. My father liked to have plenty of light, but that didn't mean that he sat in the lightest part of the house, not at all. In the evening, he didn't just use one strong lamp to illuminate what he was reading—no, in both rooms he had chandeliers with eight 25-watt or 40-watt bulbs, plus at least two lamps with 75 or 100-watt bulbs, in the hallway another chandelier with three 25-watt bulbs and the lamps were on in his study too, just in case he fetched a book from the bookcase. How many watts does that add up to? Six or seven hundred. Imagine that half a billion fathers around the world have a similar habit—how would that add up? I have reserved the concept 'civilised' for freedoms that can be exercised sustainably by everyone. Civilised people place a lot of emphasis on the societal level when making their individual decisions, and that leads to a society that would suit a lot of people, I expect. But it does not lead to individuals degenerating into small, measly, unimportant cogs in a society where they must toe the line, because freedom is the main thing, and individualism goes along with it. In all of this I have not used words such as responsibility. It implies that there is something or someone that you are responsible for, which taken literally means that you must respond to someone's questions about your conduct. In a simpler sense it means that you carry out your actions yourself, you are the person who thought them up and you will get to hear if there is criticism of your actions. The word responsibility is actually superfluous, because the situation as I see it is that if you consider freedom important and you want to look after yourself and you want to go around in a society, then it follows on logically that it is not i-freedom but s-freedom which must come first.

Put the other way around, someone who doesn't want to include the societal level when making individual decisions shouldn't be surprised if society protests against this. Today's society is chock-full of laws and regulations, but for a substantial part they are simply the consequence of antisocial behaviour by individuals. The more people there are who exercise i-freedoms without paying attention to whether they are also s-freedoms, the more hassle there will be from the state.

But this too can be turned around. The more people there are who exercise s-freedom rather than i-freedom, the smaller the state can be. Greater exercise of s-freedom would also result in more collectively organised activities such as transport, vegetable growing, care for the elderly, nursing, etcetera. Alternatively, the higher the level of civilisation, the smaller the state can be.

Earlier I wrote that it was quite logical that a society would ask a group of individuals from that society to keep an eye on the societal level. This could be called an administration, a government, a state, a consultation group, a co-ordinating committee or whatever. Such a group could come up with tight rules, but could also suggest something dynamic such as every month the speed limit for cars will go down by one kilometre per hour until the number of deaths on the roads is less than twenty per year (in the Netherlands it is now seven hundred, in 1972 there were as many as 3264). Then it is up to drivers to take action. If they are OK with more than twenty deaths per year, then they will find a society in their way that keeps reducing the speed limit. If they want a high speed limit, then they need to incorporate a lot of caution and safety into their driving style. It then becomes almost a game, although notably it still includes twenty deaths.

You could devise a similar game about greenhouse gases. The government could say that a civilised country keeps to the Kyoto Protocol or something similar, and while we fail to do so, the monthly price of finite energy (nuclear and fossil fuels) would increase by ten percent until we meet the targets set. Then it's the turn of individuals, they get to operate the controls that determine the energy price. It would not surprise me if energy saving suddenly happened very

quickly. Individuals would no longer wait until ‘they’ invent a solution; they take action themselves.

In other words, the strong version founding a society based on freedom really doesn’t have to mean that an enormous number of strict rules are introduced to hold back all the greedy i-freedoms. The examples above were ones that just popped into my head, but they do include the feature that ordinary people in a society get to operate the controls that determine the boundary conditions for their society. And they do this in freedom.

50 ECONOMISING

If your friend, husband, wife, child, parent, grandpa, grandma or neighbour becomes ill, you can leave them to fend for themselves. Such a freedom exists. There must be some sort of law requiring that parents must look after their children on penalty of being deprived of parental rights, but there is no law compelling looking after one’s grandparents and even less for one’s neighbours. So you can weasel out of it if you don’t fancy looking after them. This is a freedom which you have. But others won’t find your behaviour very nice. There is also no law which compels you to look after the Earth in the case that it is unhealthy or is wasting away. So the freedom exists to not let yourself be bothered by this and carry on wasting and polluting. But what sort of freedom is that, when you don’t want to care for your parents or for the Earth? It is not s-freedom.

If the calculations of ecological footprints are correct, then two hectares are available per inhabitant of the Earth. The average Dutch person, however, uses twice as much, and the average American more than twice as much again.³² You might try to justify this as follows: we’ll just make sure that people elsewhere remain suitably poor, then the Earth can cope with it. This is freedom of thought. But I wouldn’t consider it very nice if these thoughts turn into actions.

It is also not very nice to get the world population to reduce rapidly,

though that would increase the number of hectares per head, so there remains only one nice thing to do. Economise.

This can be turned into a good game. It is a bit like going on a long-distance walking holiday. If your rucksack is too heavy to carry for two weeks through the mountains you have two options, leave out a number of items or swap them for versions that weigh twenty percent less. The ‘One and a Half Hectares Game’ is somewhat more challenging, because the average Dutch person must save 60 percent for the sake of the climate.

Sometimes that is simple. I gave the example of my father who left on lightbulbs totalling more than 600 watts, while I can read my book using a low-energy bulb that uses 15 watts including the transformer. This saves almost 98 percent, making good progress.

‘Yes, but I want lots of light in the room’.

Well, Rembrandt would be happy with the light I have...

This 98 percent is close to 100 percent. Sometimes it is simpler not to do something at all than to reduce it, compare this to not taking a telephoto lens in your rucksack. Never going by plane (a very good idea because of ecological and noise effects) is easier than ‘sometimes’. Some places become difficult to reach, as ships also drop out, they use even more fuel per kilometre than planes. But there are plenty of places that are reachable without ships or planes where you have not yet been that are certainly worth seeing.

My remark about ships makes me think of another game, a technological game, suitable for inventors. Why are there no high-technology sailing ships with solar-powered auxiliary engines? Because they are economically uncompetitive? Ecologically they would be extremely competitive, close to the 98 percent I mentioned above, but apparently ‘they’ (the ship owners) don’t take ecological considerations into account and so ‘they’ (the engineers) don’t work on such designs. This means that ‘we’ cannot insist that we really live in a high-technology civilisation.

On the land, the situation is similar. There exist small vehicles that travel at 45 kilometres per hour, much less fast or heavy than cars, and also less deadly in crashes, but they make loads of noise. It seems an obvious idea to me to cross them with covered recumbent

bicycles and with the solar vehicles made for special races that travel astonishingly fast.

Until this level of technology is achieved, a certain amount of economising is the only way of looking after the Earth properly. This certainly does not lead to living in a shack and having difficulty keeping body and soul together, but it does require some thought. It is quite a challenging game to turn around the Keeling Curve,³³ but people have enough brains for this. They are in excellent condition, because they are almost unused when it comes to matters such as this.

51 MORE OR LESS RICH

One thing is being economical, another is being rich in the material sense. There are rich countries and poor countries, and in all of these countries you have rich individuals and (relatively) poor individuals. The stereotypical rich person, as on the planet of a thousand people, doesn't do a stroke of work and yet becomes richer while doing nothing, sits on a park bench so as to take up two spaces, cuts the cake into unequal pieces and takes the largest piece. For the second consideration, the stereotypical rich person is not interested in what happens in faraway countries as long as they obtain massive financial returns from those countries. For the third consideration, the rich person is not interested in whether scarcity is caused somewhere, and as for the fourth, dividing up scarcity, don't even mention it—and so the same is true for founding a society based on freedom. The stereotypical rich person won't play the one and a half hectares game either, even though he or she could probably save much more than 60 percent, e.g. by building a house half the size and using the rest of the money to pay for solar panels for an entire street.

Non-stereotypical rich people might consider how much of the above applies to them.

Rich countries, including the Netherlands, also fit the stereotype quite well. However, they do introduce all sorts of corrective measures as mentioned earlier, such as minimum wage, social

security, development aid, but it is mostly too little, too late. The Netherlands does sign up to things like the Kyoto protocol, but then refuses to follow it. In other words, the average Dutch person refuses to follow it.³⁴ Civilised?

This is down to the state ideology, and to rich people, but also to non-rich people who were nevertheless born in a rich country, purely by chance, and often act as if the ruling way of thinking, thinking with the wallet, is the best that there is.

Earlier in the book, I raised the question of where the fun is in greed and such things.

You come to the end of your life and you can say that you always did your utmost best to find bargains and the cheapest shops. So?

Or maybe you were rich and collected houses that became steadily larger, and cars that became steadily larger and more expensive, etcetera, etcetera. Then you come to the end of your life and you can say that you started with so many things and ended with five times as many. So? I don't understand what the point is of being the extension of a mountain of steel, stones and plastic.

Or, you were taken to school and sports by car as a child, and you continued later in this vein with holiday flights and escalators, with a motor mower and a greenhouse-gas-spewing leaf blower. Then you come to the end of your life and you can say that it was all nice and easy. And as for the disproportionate contributions to climate change, everyone did it, the whole country did it.

This is becoming rather negative.

One strange thing about rich individuals and rich countries is that they consider it the worst possible thing if wealth should decrease. In the material sense, that is. In other senses things could become richer, more social, more attractive, more free, more friendly, more aesthetic, less primitive use of brains, etcetera. In short: less things, more human. Chasing greed, laziness and suchlike makes you a rather dismal person. The freedom to be dismal exists, of course, but don't think up dismal stuff that has worldwide consequences via capital flows and exhaust fumes. Save the rest of us from this, please.

I have not used the words 'responsibility', 'fault' and 'honesty' in

this book, but it is about cause and effect, i.e. consequences. On the planet of a thousand people there was one rich person per five hundred people, and these five hundred experienced problems resulting from the choices of that one person. I would not know what the exact proportions are on Earth, but here too the arithmetic shows that there must be relatively few rich people who live at the expense of the rest. Why would you want that? Why would you not want to see the effects, the consequences of your actions with your own eyes?

The freedom to support the capitalist ideology exists, but if you support it, please say out loud that you don't care about the collateral damage of many deaths from hunger. The freedom to cause scarcity exists, but don't forget to add that you are begrudging others' freedom by doing this. The freedom to choose convenience exists, but say out loud that destroying peace and quiet with your car doesn't bother you.

52 WHICH FREEDOM?

The greatest form of riches is freedom. When I started writing this book I had a number of ingredients, but I didn't yet know what sort of dish they would turn into. I also didn't yet know which main paths and side-paths I would come across. I did know that it concerned ideas which first germinated in me a very long time ago. Clearly it was now time to write this book, containing thoughts from last year but sometimes also from ten, twenty, thirty or even more years ago.

When I was a child, we had a type of rush matting on the floor. If I kneeled on the floor, it made deep grooves in my skin, but I didn't notice them. I had just started going to school, I was learning to read and I fetched the newspaper, which was much too big to hold, even though I was tall for my age, 1.22 metres to be precise. I spread the newspaper out on the floor and tried to decipher some photo captions. It was October 1956, the Hungarian uprising had broken out. I didn't understand it, and asked my parents what was hap-

pening, what it was about. They were evasive, trying to protect me of course, but I didn't realise that. Strange things are happening in the world, I thought.

Although of course I couldn't put it into words at that time, what happened then in Hungary was about the freedom to think and say and do what you want.

Then came the decolonisation of Africa, a number of exciting years for children who read the newspapers, particularly in 1960, resulting in a large number of countries obtaining freedom—and I was allowed to edit the map in the atlas a few times.³⁵ That was about freedom.

The next hotbed was the anti-racism movement in the United States. That was certainly about freedom. And the old man, Bertrand Russell (1872–1970), who went to prison in 1961 because of taking part in a Ban the Bomb demonstration. That was about protecting the world from nuclear destruction.

And so on, and so forth, etcetera.

This book more or less wrote itself. I had a few sentences about the park bench in my head for years, and the same for the planet of a thousand people. I also had the idea of beginning with a definition of freedom which included all the uncivil freedoms as well as harmless ones. It is not so difficult to sketch a beautiful world based on one or other lofty idea, and if everyone adopts that idea, we've achieved it. But I myself am one of the first to grumble if following a particular idea is made compulsory. That sort of thing doesn't work, people don't allow such a thing to be imposed on them—not any more, thanks to the 1960s when moralising was roundly criticised. For example, read the newspapers from around 1960, that was another universe, full of moralising, full of finger-wagging (incidentally, in the Netherlands, 'don't wag your finger' is one of the most finger-wagging remarks).

Using the examples of the park bench, the planet of a thousand people and the birthday cake, I have taken a rather arithmetical approach to the matter. The definition of freedom I have used is aimed at individuals and is exceptionally broad, but individual actions add up to something at the level of society. This arithmetic

also lies behind the invisible hand of Adam Smith, but there are also other invisible hands, hands which Smith knew nothing about. Greenhouse gases, plastic in the sea, etcetera.

For the societal level we have a stack of social instincts, as described in chapter 46. Almost no one would think it acceptable to abolish them. That is good. Less good is that the social instincts are not very much combined with arithmetic. Individuals do things that add up to less pleasant consequences a long way away, but the social instincts do not extend that far of their own accord; they seem to have been developed for use on the scale of small groups.

Luckily, humans have large brains and are quite capable of working out what the worldwide consequences of individual actions are, and therefore what the invisible hands are doing. In theory, at least. In practice they tend to forget it, which quite simply amounts to forgetting about the societal level.

All the same, that is crazy. It is crazy because it is well understood that it is in one's own interests to take account of the societal level and even the worldwide scale. Even the purest form of altruism can be counted as a form of self-interest,³⁶ so even those who find altruism odious ought to be able to understand the worldwide scale via self-interest. Brains really are big enough to count to seven billion, the scale of the Earth and the scale of the future.

However, there is a snake in the grass: the ideology of the rich countries. A lot of fun was made of indoctrination in the Soviet states, but I don't see an enormous difference to what we see here and now. Here it is also the case that you have the choice between signing up to the state ideology and signing up to the state ideology. And this state ideology contains a load of greed and emphasises individual freedoms to a greater extent than is good for the societal level and for the future of society.

Founding a society based on freedom as sketched in this book would amount to a paradigm shift.³⁷ A government, if any, would need to be there specifically to watch over the societal level, not to support the more coarse individual freedoms. In misanthropic moods I think that improvement would take a long time, but misanthropy

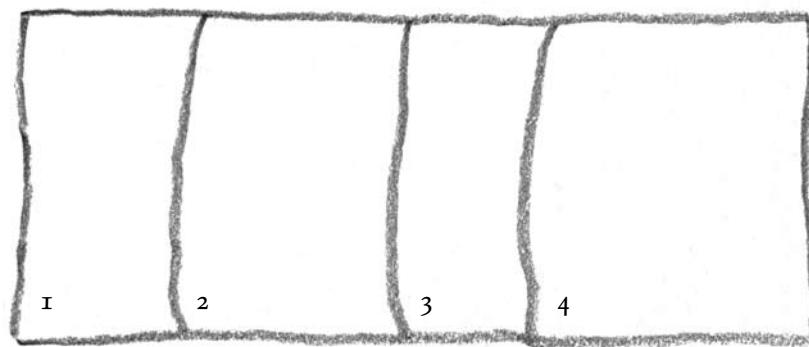
is a state of mind of people who are actually optimistic. When I'm in other moods, the situation seems better.

Then there is the question: which society do you want?

And then there is the answer: live your life as if the society that you want already exists, and your life will make a difference via an invisible hand. A pleasant life can be lived on one and a half hectares. This can be done directly, right now, immediately. This is the case for people in all positions in society, from dignitaries to ordinary folk.

While reading, re-reading and writing this book, the spectrum of four considerations, four sorts of freedom, came to me all at once. The spectrum runs from 'the society can kiss my arse' through to a sustainable Earth. In the diagram below, the level of civilisation increases from 1 to 4 by not exercising various freedoms. In other words, in the material sense, the number of freedoms decreases as you go from 1 to 4, but in the social sense life becomes richer and richer as civilisation increases (see also page 41).

The core of the matter is: if you consider freedom important, which freedom do you want? Lots of freedom for yourself, including various forms of greed—or freedom for the whole, and therefore also for you?



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ENDNOTES

- 1—Reimboud 2009.
- 2—Rawls 1971, p. 18 (16).
- 3—Boon 1971.
- 4—Rawls 1971, p. 66 (57).
- 5—Rawls 1971, p. 72 (63).
- 6—Mill 1859, Chapter 2, p. 98.
- 7—I have no knowledge of legal matters; the former director of the Dutch secret service Arthur Docters van Leeuwen mentioned these concepts in an interview.
- 8—Aktie Strohalm ('Last Straw Action') is currently called STRO—www.soci-altrade.org
- 9—Translated from cuttings from a geography textbook from the early 1960s,

- probably published by Wolters.
- 10—As above. Luckily the word ‘wrong’ is written in my handwriting in the margin—also early 1960s.
- 11—‘De Geo – basisboek’, 2007 edition, page 131.
- 12—Marx 1846. In an English edition of Marx’s book, this quote appears as ‘The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas’.
- 13—Mill 1859, Chapter 3, p. 113.
- 14—Mill 1859, Chapter 3, p. 109.
- 15—Mill 1859, Chapter 3, p. 114.
- 16—Mill 1859, Chapter 3, p. 119.
- 17—Mill 1859, Chapter 3, p. 114.
- 18—Mill 1859, Chapter 3, p. 139.
- 19—Purely coincidental. I updated an old spreadsheet of traffic deaths with figures from recent years, the total reminded me of something, so I looked it up, and the Dutch Wikipedia gave precisely the same figure in the entry ‘Jodenvervolging’ (Persecution of Jews).
- 20—See Wikipedia entry for ‘Peak oil’.
- 21—Percentage based on the average figures for the years 1971–2008. Wikipedia entry for ‘Keeling Curve’.
- 22—Luke 2:1
- 23—This is just an example; <http://duurzamestad.groningen.nl>
- 24—See for example Singer 1993.
- 25—De Waal 2009 and his earlier works (such as De Waal et al. 2006).
- 26—Wikipedia entry for ‘Current sea level rise’.
- 27—IPCC 2007.
- 28—Wikipedia entry for ‘Great Pacific Garbage Patch’.
- 29—From the Dutch government’s English translation of the 2008 constitution: <http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten-en-publicaties/brochures/2008/10/20/the-constitution-of-the-kingdom-of-the-netherlands-2008.html>
- 30—Wikipedia entry for ‘Bellum omnium contra omnes’ (Latin for ‘the war of all against all’).
- 31—Smith 1759.
- 32—Living Planet Report 2008: 2.1, 4.0 and 9.4 hectares.
- 33—Wikipedia entry for ‘Keeling Curve’.
- 34—<http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/dpr/netr.pdf> A few hours after I typed this, I saw newspaper headlines saying that the price of energy is increasing because of the climate, some twelve years after Kyoto.
- 35—Wikipedia entry for ‘Decolonization of Africa’.
- 36—Reimboud & Wiersma 1993.
- 37—Wikipedia entry for ‘Paradigm shift’.

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after a year of studying physics Weia Reimboud (1950) studied sociology
followed by philosophy via self study
she also did courses in
precision machinery
font design
and computer composition

Atalanta started 1980 as a women's print shop
turning to publishing a few years later
with publications mostly about
philosophy, environment and politics
and also books for children

ATALANTA

www.at-A-lanta.nl

atalanta@at-A-lanta-nl